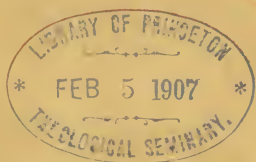


THE CHILD'S LIFE OF JESUS



P

W



Division BS 2420

Section 6.381



THE CHILD'S LIFE OF JESUS



THE WISE MEN FROM THE EAST

THE CHILD'S LIFE OF JESUS

BY THE REV. C. M. STEEDMAN

VICAR OF SHAW

WITH THIRTY PICTURES IN COLOUR

BY PAUL WOODROFFE



NEW YORK

FREDERICK A. STOKES COMPANY

PUBLISHERS

Edinburgh : T and A. CONSTABLE, Printers to His Majesty

TO PHYLLIS

P R E F A C E

SIMPLE and excellent as are many of the existing stories of the Life of our Lord for children, they are mostly of a frankly abridged type. The present work, while marked, it is hoped, by the simplicity which should characterise a book intended primarily for the young, is an attempt to present the Life and Teaching of the children's Saviour in somewhat fuller and more generous outline. In its production much valuable help has been found in the writings of Père Didon, Drs. Edersheim and Geikie, Dean Farrar, and other well-known authors. The legends, verses, and anecdotes which give colour to its pages, have been gathered from a variety of sources, but special mention should be made of Dr. Miller's charming little books of the 'Silent Times' series, from which a number of striking stories and quotations have been taken.

The writer would be ungrateful did he not recognise how much the Child's Life of Jesus owes to the graceful dress in which it appears, and to the beautiful pictures with which Mr. Paul Woodroffe has illustrated it. It only remains for him to add that he sends out the book with the earnest prayer that it may prove of some small service to the Church of God, by helping, in however slight a degree, the children who may read it towards a better and truer knowledge of Him, 'Whom truly to know is everlasting life.'

SHAW VICARAGE, WILTS.
Ascension Day, 1906.

CONTENTS

BOOK I

SUNRISE ON THE HILLS

CHAP.	PAGE
I. THE STORY OF THE WONDERFUL LIFE,	1
II. THE VISION OF ZACHARIAS—THE MESSAGE THE ANGEL BROUGHT TO MARY—THE BIRTH OF THE KING'S FORERUNNER,	5
III. BETHLEHEM,	18
IV. THE CIRCUMCISION AND PRESENTATION IN THE TEMPLE,	25
V. THE VISIT OF THE WISE MEN—THE MURDER OF THE INNOCENTS,	34
VI. THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT—THE NAZARETH LIFE, . .	45
VII. THE VISIT TO THE TEMPLE,	57

BOOK II

THE SHINING LIGHT

I. THE PREACHING OF THE KING'S FORERUNNER—THE BAPTISM OF JESUS,	71
II. HOW THE KING FOUGHT HIS BATTLE IN THE WILDERNESS,	80

X CHAP.	THE CHILD'S LIFE OF JESUS	PAGE
III.	THE CALL OF THE FIRST DISCIPLES—HOW JESUS TURNED WATER INTO WINE AT THE MARRIAGE FEAST OF CANA,	89
IV.	JESUS' HOME AT CAPERNAUM—THE FIRST CLEANS- ING OF THE TEMPLE—THE RULER WHO CAME TO JESUS BY NIGHT—THE WOMAN AT THE WELL OF SYCHAR,	102
V.	HOW JESUS HEALED THE NOBLEMAN'S SON—THE REJECTION AT NAZARETH—THE MIRACULOUS DRAUGHT OF FISHES,	118
VI.	MIRACLES OF HEALING AT CAPERNAUM—THE CLEANSING OF THE LEPER,	131
VII.	HOW A PARALYSED MAN CAME THROUGH THE ROOF—THE CALL OF LEVI THE PUBLICAN—HOW THE KING CHOSE TWELVE AMBASSADORS,	141
VIII.	THE KING ON THE MOUNT OF BLESSING,	155
IX.	THE CRIPPLE AT THE HOUSE OF MERCY—HOW THE DISCIPLES PLUCKED THE EARS OF CORN— THE STONE-MASON WITH THE WITHERED HAND —THE ROMAN SOLDIER AND HIS SICK SLAVE— HOW JESUS RAISED A DEAD MAN TO LIFE AT PLEASANT NAIN,	165
X.	ST. JOHN IN THE BLACK CASTLE—THE MURDER IN THE DUNGEON—SIMON THE PHARISEE AND THE WOMAN WHO WAS A SINNER,	177

CONTENTS

xi

CHAP.

PAGE

XI. THE SEVEN PICTURES OF THE KINGDOM—THE STORM ON THE LAKE—JESUS AND THE DEMONIAK OF GADARA,	188
XII. THE LITTLE MAID WHOM JESUS RAISED FROM THE DEAD—THE KING'S AMBASSADORS—THE MIRACLE OF THE FIVE LOAVES—HOW JESUS WALKED UPON THE WAVES,	198
XIII. CHRIST THE BREAD OF LIFE—THE HEATHEN WOMAN WHO DESIRED TO BE FED WITH THE CRUMBS WHICH FELL FROM JESUS' TABLE—THE DEAF MAN WITH THE STAMMERING TONGUE IN DECA- POLIS—THE SEVEN LOAVES WHICH FED FOUR THOUSAND,	210
XIV. ST. PETER'S BRAVE CONFESSION AT CÆSAREA PHILIPPI—HOW THE KING APPEARED IN HIS GLORY ON THE MOUNTAIN—THE HEALING OF THE LUNATIC BOY,	221
XV. THE SERMON PREACHED BY A LITTLE CHILD—A LESSON ABOUT FORGIVENESS—JESUS AT THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES—THE MAN WHO WAS BORN BLIND—THE ALLEGORY OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD,	233
XVI. THE MISSION OF THE SEVENTY—THE HEALING OF THE TEN LEPERS—JESUS TEACHES HIS DISCIPLES TO PRAY—THE PARABLES OF THE RICH CHURL AND THE GOOD SAMARITAN—THE HOME OF BETHANY,	246

XVII. JESUS AT THE FEAST OF DEDICATION—THE MEAL AT THE PHARISEE'S HOUSE, AND WHAT HAP- PENED AT IT—THE PARABLES OF THE GREAT SUPPER, THE LOST SHEEP, THE LOST COIN, AND THE PRODIGAL SON,	258
XVIII. THE PARABLES OF THE UNJUST STEWARD, THE RICH MAN AND THE BEGGAR, THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN—JESUS BLESSES THE LITTLE CHILDREN—THE STORY OF 'THE GREAT RE- FUSAL'—THE PARABLE OF THE LABOURERS IN THE VINEYARD,	272
XIX. HOW JESUS RAISED LAZARUS FROM THE DEAD— CAIAPHAS AND HIS PROPHECY—JESUS FORETELLS HIS PASSION—THE BOON SALOME CRAVED FOR HER TWO SONS,	285
XX. THE BLIND BEGGAR OF JERICHO—HOW ZACCHÆUS CLIMBED INTO A TREE TO SEE JESUS—THE PARABLE OF THE NOBLEMAN AND THE PIECES OF MONEY—MARY AND HER BOX OF SPIKENARD,	295

BOOK III

THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW

I. HOW THE KING ENTERED JERUSALEM IN TRIUMPH —THE FRUITLESS FIG-TREE—THE SECOND CLEANS- ING OF THE TEMPLE—THE LITTLE SINGING
--

CONTENTS

xiii

PAGE

CHAP.

CHILDREN—THE QUESTION WHICH WAS PUT TO JESUS IN THE TEMPLE AND HOW HE ANSWERED IT—THE PARABLES OF THE FALSE SON, THE WICKED HUSBANDMEN, AND THE WEDDING- FEAST,	309
II. A QUESTION ABOUT TRIBUTE-MONEY—A LESSON ON THE RESURRECTION LIFE—JESUS' STERNNESS AND HIS PITY—A POOR WIDOW AND HER OFFERING — THE INQUIRING GREEKS — JESUS LEAVES THE TEMPLE,	324
III. THE SECOND COMING—THE PARABLES OF THE WISE AND FOOLISH VIRGINS, THE TALENTS, THE SHEEP AND THE GOATS—HOW JUDAS BETRAYED HIS MASTER—HOW THE KING GAVE HIS DIS- CIPLES A ROYAL GIFT,	336
IV. GETHSEMANE—THE ARREST—JESUS IN THE PALACE OF CAIAPHAS—HOW ST. PETER DENIED HIS MASTER—THE FATE OF JUDAS,	351
V. THE TRIAL BEFORE PILATE,	364
VI. CALVARY,	374

BOOK IV

THE GLORY BEYOND

CHAP.	PAGE
I. THE FIRST EASTER DAWN—THE JOURNEY TO EMMAUS—JESUS APPEARS TO HIS DISCIPLES IN THE UPPER ROOM,	391
II. DOUBTING THOMAS AND THE RISEN LORD—THE MORNING ON THE LAKE—HOW THE KING WENT UP TO HEAVEN,	403
INDEX,	417

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

The Wise Men from the East— <i>Frontispiece</i> .	AT PAGE
The Angel's Message to Mary,	12
The Angel and the Shepherds,	22
The Visit of the Shepherds,	24
The Presentation in the Temple,	28
The Flight into Egypt,	42
The Workshop of Nazareth,	50
Jesus among the Doctors,	64
The Baptism of Jesus,	78
The Temptation,	84
The Marriage at Cana,	98
The Call of the Fishermen,	126
The Sower,	188
The Raising of Jairus' Daughter,	200
The Miracle of the Loaves,	204
The Transfiguration,	226
The Good Samaritan,	252
The Good Shepherd,	264

	AT PAGE
The Prodigal Son,	270
Jesus Blessing Little Children,	276
The Entry into Jerusalem,	312
The Last Supper,	348
The Agony in the Garden,	354
The Crown of Thorns,	370
Christ before Pilate,	372
Jesus on the Cross,	382
The Resurrection,	392
The Angel at the Sepulchre,	394
The Supper at Emmaus,	400
The Ascension,	414

BOOK I

SUNRISE ON THE HILLS

‘O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by;
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting light;
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee to-night!’

THE CHILD'S LIFE OF JESUS

I

THE STORY OF THE WONDERFUL LIFE

WE all love to hear stories, and the best stories are generally those that have to do with great and noble lives. In the library of the world we find many beautiful stories of this kind written down for our learning. As stars in the sky, shining innumerable, so are the lives of the apostles and martyrs, the saints and heroes, the great poets and mighty thinkers, who from time to time have lived near God and revealed His mind to men. Lives like these have been among God's most precious gifts to this world. Like the stars by which the sailor steers his course, they have pointed many a storm-tossed soul the way to Heaven, and the light they have shed upon the world's darkness is a light which shall never grow dim or fade away.

But there is One life which must always come first, as the most wonderful and blessed life that has been ever lived, and that is the life of Him who is 'the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world,' our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Many hundreds of years have passed by since the story of this wonderful life was first given to the world, and yet it is the one story of which the world has never grown weary. It is an old, old story. Even you, dear child, have heard it many times before. Yet though old, it is

somehow always new. There are some things of which we never tire: the song of the birds, the scent of the roses, the tender colouring of the spring flowers, the blue of the summer sky. Things like these never seem to lose their freshness. It is just so with the story of Jesus; the more we read it the more wonderful it seems, and the greater hold it takes of our hearts.

It is the story of One who, though the great Son of God Himself, was yet born the Son of Mary; of One who, though throned in glory at God's right hand, yet laid aside His royal robes and His kingly crown and came down from Heaven to be born a little child, to live a sad and sorrowful life, and to die a cruel death at last upon the Cross.

It is the story of One whose heart was large enough to take in all the world; who was full of pity and compassion for the sorrowing and the lost, who loved little children; who although He could be very stern in the face of cruelty and hypocrisy, yet never said a harsh word or did an unkind thing in all His life; who, as He died, died with uplifted hands, praying for the world that hated and rejected Him.

Yes, it is all this, but it is even more than this. It is the story of One who, dying, rose again from death, and who, having entered Heaven as our great High Priest, never ceases to intercede for us with God before the golden altar.

It is the story of One who carries our sorrows, rules our lives, wins forgiveness of our sins, the same kind, loving, tender Friend He always was, 'Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and forever.'

How did Jesus come to live that wonderful life of His, which we find written down for us in the Gospels? What was the reason of His being born into the world at all?

THE STORY OF THE WONDERFUL LIFE 3

For an answer to this question we must turn back to the very beginning of the Bible. God, we are told, at the first made the world 'very good.' He created man after His own image, perfectly good and so perfectly happy. He set him in the beautiful Garden of Paradise and gave him all his heart's desire. But in an evil hour man was tempted by God's enemy, the devil, and fell into sin, and by sin came separation from God and so death—death of the body, and far worse than this, death of the soul. The world God had made very good became very evil and corrupt; it looked as if the devil had triumphed and God's purpose in making man had been utterly defeated. But God said, 'No, this beautiful world of mine shall not perish, for I will save it.' And so, even before the angel with flaming sword had shut the gate of Paradise upon poor, sad, ruined Eve, the promise of a Deliverer came. God said He would send His own dear Son into the world to undo the devil's work, to pay the debt of sin, and to bring back man's lost likeness to Himself.

Ah, how eagerly the world looked forward to the coming of the great Deliverer. All down the ages psalmist after psalmist sang sweet songs about it; prophet after prophet kept the hope of it alive in people's hearts. Yet time went on and still the Saviour did not come, until it almost looked as if God had forgotten His promise. Only God never forgets—

'God's ways seem dark, but soon or late
They touch the shining hills of day.'

All this time He was preparing the world, He was getting it ready for the birth of His Son. The world was getting more and more dissatisfied with its old worn-out religions: people's hearts were feeling more and more

the need of a Saviour. Then just when the night was darkest the dawn broke upon the hills, the world's Deliverer came, Jesus Christ was born at Bethlehem.

So the wonder and the glory of God's plan was revealed at last. Jesus lived, He died, He rose again from death, and by His death He destroyed death, and by His rising to life again restored to us everlasting life.

This then was the reason of Jesus' coming. The story of the wonderful life is the story of God's purpose in blessing and saving the world.

Dear child, as we read that story let us remember why it has been written down for us in the Gospels; not simply that we may admire it for its beauty and loveliness, but that it may draw us to a right belief in Jesus, to look up to Him as our Saviour, to love Him and crown Him in our hearts as King.

'Love Him,' says an old book called *The Imitation of Christ*, 'and keep Him for thy friend, who when all go away will not leave thee, nor suffer thee to perish at the last.'

There is no one else so worthy of our love as Jesus, no friendship, however deep and tender, that can compare with His.

'Sweeter than a prayer-bell for a saint in dying,
Sweeter than a death-bell for a saint at rest,
Music struck in Heaven with earth's faint replying,
Life is good, and death is good, for Christ is best.'

II

THE VISION OF ZACHARIAS—THE MESSAGE THE ANGEL BROUGHT TO MARY—THE BIRTH OF THE KING'S FORERUNNER

THE glad news that the coming of the Saviour was at hand was first brought to the world by one of the holy angels.

The Bible is all ashine with angel stories. Over and over again we read how God used these bright and beautiful beings, whose highest joy it is to serve Him, as His messengers. The world, even when it had drifted far away from God into the darkness, was never allowed to drift quite away; there was always the golden thread of God's love to bind it fast. The darkness was not altogether dark, for the white-winged angels still went to and fro bearing their messages of hope and consolation, and brightening the sad lot of men with their loving ministry.

And now the time had come for God to give the crowning proof of the love He bore the world by sending His Son to be born and to die upon the Cross, and again the angels are the first to bring the news.

An angel, as we shall presently see, appears to Zacharias in the Temple; an angel, a little later, announces the coming birth of Jesus to the Virgin Mary, whom God had chosen to be His mother. Later again, when Jesus is born at Bethlehem, an angel carries the

message of His birth to the shepherds on the hills, and we catch a glimpse of a great flight of angels who had come to bear him company, streaming across the starry sky, and hear them singing as they go.

Zacharias, to whom the message first was brought, was not one of the great ones of the world, as the world counts greatness. He was a simple country priest, living a simple quiet life with his wife, Elisabeth, in the city of Hebron in the hill country of Judæa.

But both Zacharias and Elisabeth were good and holy people who loved God dearly and kept His commandments with their whole hearts. And because they were so good and holy, God greatly blessed them; only there was one crowning blessing that they lacked. Many years had passed by since they first made their home in the little mountain city, and the sunset of their lives was coming on, and God had not given them a little child.

It was a great grief to a Jew to be childless. To have no son to come after him to keep his name alive, to be cut off from the hope of being a possible forefather of the Christ, all this was a fate he dreaded very sorely. This fate seemed in store for Zacharias, and the thought of it distressed him greatly.

Often and earnestly, even as Hannah of old prayed for Samuel, must the good Elisabeth have prayed to God for the gift of the little boy she used to dream about as coming to cheer and brighten their lonely home. But the years passed by and God had not seen fit to send him, and now that she and her husband were growing old, the light of hope in their hearts was beginning to burn very low.

I have said that Zacharias was a priest, and it was his duty therefore to serve God in His holy Temple at Jerusalem.

The priests of the Temple were divided into twenty-four companies, or 'courses' as they were called, each course being known by a different name, and each having charge of the Temple services for certain weeks in the year. Zacharias belonged to the course or company of 'Abijah,' and it fell to his lot to go to Jerusalem to take his turn at serving at the Temple altar in each spring and fall of the year.

At the time of which we are thinking, autumn, with all its wealth of coloured leaves and ripened fruit, had come, and he had travelled up from Hebron to take up his abode in the Temple.

One day a great happiness comes his way. It so happens that he is chosen to offer the incense upon the golden altar. Every morning and evening this solemn offering of incense took place at the time the lamb was offered up on the altar of burnt sacrifice, and greatly blessed was the priest to whom the lot fell to swing the golden censer before God, and to offer the prayers in the Holy Place. No service it was thought brought him so near to God as this; and it was always the event of a lifetime, for no one was ever allowed to offer the incense more than once.

Very early in the morning, before it was light, the priests would arise and bathe and put on their white garments. They then stood in a circle in the 'Hall of Polished Stones' as it was called, waiting for the lot to be cast which should determine who should offer the incense that day. When this was known, and all the preparations had been made, as soon as the first scarlet shaft of sunrise touched the distant hills, the Temple gates were thrown open, and three blasts from the silver trumpets sounded, calling the worshippers to God's House.

On this particular morning it was Zacharias' turn to

make the offering. Awestruck at the thought of drawing so near to God, and yet with a great gladness too at his heart, he mounts the marble steps which lead to the Holy Place. We can picture him as he goes, the kindly faced old man, with his bent form and silver hair. He is clad in a robe of snowy white, and he wears a mitre of white upon his head, while his feet are bare and unsandalled. Two other priests, also robed in white, walk at his side. It is their duty to prepare the altar and keep alive the sacred fire which burns upon it, and which is never allowed to go out.

When this was done the priests retired, closing the golden doors behind them, and Zacharias was left alone in the Holy Place—alone with God. What a solemn moment that must have been for him. Reverently he takes the golden censer in his hand, and as the smoke of the incense mounts upward he bows his head before God in humble, earnest prayer. I think we may guess what the burden of his prayer would be. He would pray, would he not, for the peace of Jerusalem, for the pardon of the nation's sins and of his own, for the speedy coming of the Christ? Perhaps, too, there would be a prayer for the little child for whom his heart was longing. 'Who knows, God may give him to me even now,' he thinks.

And, as he prays, suddenly the Holy Place is filled with a burst of glory so bright that it makes the flame of the great gold candlestick which lights the chamber seem to burn dim; and on the right side of the altar—the side of good omen—there dawns through a haze of gold the figure of an angel, and the heart of Zacharias is filled with fear.

Have you ever noticed how, when angels are described in the Bible, their coming always brings fear at first?

Was it because they came in such a sudden, unexpected way as a rule, and because they were so bright and dazzling to look upon? It may be so, but perhaps the real reason was because the light that shone upon their faces was a light reflected from the face of God. Coming straight from God's presence, they brought the awful sense of His presence with them, and men were afraid because, being brought near to the angel, they felt somehow they were being brought near to God Himself. And so Zacharias was sore afraid; but when the angel opened his lips to speak, his fear was swallowed up in a great wonder and amazement, for the angel's words made it clear that the time which he and all God's faithful servants had been so eagerly expecting had come at last, that Jesus the Deliverer was at hand. He tells Zacharias that he should have a son whose name must be called John, who should be given to God from his birth, and that God would make of him a great prophet, strong, fearless, and splendid, like the prophet Elijah. More than this, that he should be forerunner to the Christ, and by his preaching and teaching should prepare people's hearts to receive Him when He came.

How wonderful it all sounded! Ah, but Zacharias was an old man, and his wife too was old. It seemed difficult to believe that God had actually sent him such a message; too good to be true that he really should have a son at last. And so, would the angel give him a sign? he asks. And the angel gives him a sign—only not the kind of sign he expected. Because Zacharias had not believed his word—the word of the great archangel Gabriel, who stood in the presence of God Himself—he should be dumb and unable to speak until the day when God should carry out His promise, and the little boy should be born.

Meanwhile the people in the Temple Courts were waiting for Zacharias to come out and dismiss them with his blessing.

There was always a hush throughout the whole Temple when the incense was being burned, for this was the most solemn part of the morning and evening service. As long as the silver thread of the smoke in the Holy Place mounted up to God, the people without remained praying with bowed heads in silence. In silence too they stood while the lamb was offered up. Then the silver trumpets sounded, and the psalm for the day was sung, and then the priest who offered the incense would lift his hands in blessing upon them, using the very same words which Aaron had used of old when he blessed the people—

‘The Lord bless thee, and keep thee ;

The Lord make His face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee ;

The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.’

But the time went on and still Zacharias did not come, and the people began to be troubled, and to wonder what had happened.

The Holy Place was thought to be so holy that the priest never stayed in it longer than he could help. As soon as the incense had been offered, he at once reverently withdrew, lest his lingering should awaken God's displeasure.

Why then was Zacharias so long in coming? Could anything be the matter? At last the gates were thrown back and Zacharias came forth, and the worshippers could see at once that something strange and wonderful had taken place. There on the top of the steps he stood, trying to speak; but try as he might, the words refused to

BIRTH OF THE KING'S FORERUNNER 11

come. He could only make signs and point back at the Holy Place. But all the while his face was alight with a great joy, and the people understood that he had seen a vision.

Some six months passed by and Zacharias had long since gone back to Hebron, when God sent His angel once more to earth. This time he came to bring a message to Mary, the lowly maiden of Nazareth, and the news he had to tell was the wonderful news that she was to be the mother of Jesus Christ.

We know nothing of Mary's life before the angel came. The Bible simply tells us that she lived in Nazareth, and was betrothed to a poor carpenter named Joseph.

No doubt she had grown up much like other children in her quiet country home among the mountains, learning to spin and weave and bake bread, and as she grew older, fetching water from the well just as the other Nazareth maidens did.

But there was one thing which marked her out from all the rest, and that was her lovely, spotless life. We are not told whether she was beautiful in face—no doubt she was very beautiful—but she had what is after all the best and highest kind of beauty, the beauty of heart which comes from a life lived very near to God. Just as the lovely flower lives, with its face turned towards the sun, so she kept her face turned towards Heaven, and God filled her with His grace, and she grew before Him like some radiant rose or tall white lily with its heart of gold.

‘Herself a rose who bore the Rose,
She bore the Rose and felt its thorn.
All Loveliness new-born
Took on her bosom its repose,
And slept and woke there night and morn.

'Lily herself, she bore the one
Fair Lily ; sweeter, whiter far
Than she or others are ;
The Sun of Righteousness her Son,
She was His morning star.'

Mary, like every Jewish maiden, had often heard the story of the promise, and had often pondered over it and prayed about it, but she little knew how soon it should be fulfilled, or dreamt of the honour God had in store for her.

One day, however, the message comes which changes her whole life. It was spring-time, and skies were blue and the fields were full of flowers. Perhaps, as some painters have loved to picture the scene, she had gone into her garden to water her lilies in the cool of the evening ; perhaps, as others have thought, she was reading the story of the promise over to herself out of some parchment roll of the old prophets, or kneeling in the quiet of her chamber with meek hands crossed upon her breast making her morning or evening prayer to God. Suddenly a voice sounds—

'Without any noise
Being of the silence. "Hail," it said,
Thou that art highly favoured,
The Lord is with thee here and now ;
Blessed among women, thou.'

And Mary looks up, and lo ! poised in the air before her, was the angel Zacharias saw, with shining wings outspread and sweet grave face. He tells her not to be afraid, for she had found favour with God. God was about to send her a son, whose name should be called Jesus, or 'Saviour.' He should be great and be called the Son of the Highest, and God would make of Him a



THE ANGEL'S MESSAGE TO MARY

mighty King who should rule over His people, and whose kingdom, unlike the kingdoms of the earth, should never pass away.

All this must have sounded very wonderful to Mary ; but the angel had not done yet. He goes on to tell her that Jesus should be different from all other children in having no earthly father. God's Holy Spirit should overshadow Mary, and the little child that should be born of her should be called the Son of God.

Mary did not disbelieve the angel's words as Zacharias did. She could not understand them, but she felt sure they were true and that God would bring them to pass ; and so bowing her head in a spirit of sweet humility she meekly answered, ' Behold the handmaid of the Lord ; be it unto me according to thy word '—in other words, ' I belong to God ; let Him do with me as He sees fit.' And then the angel vanished and she was left alone, trembling and afraid, and yet at the same time filled with a great joy and happiness, as she thought of all that the heavenly message foreshadowed. Jesus the great Deliverer was coming, and God had chosen her to be His mother. Was not this enough to make her glad ?

The more Mary pondered over Gabriel's message, the more wonderful and glorious it seemed. She felt she must have some one to share her happy secret with her. She could not keep it to herself. The angel, before he went back to God, had told her how God had blessed Zacharias and Elisabeth as well, in giving them the promise of a son. Now Elisabeth was Mary's cousin, and so Mary made up her mind to travel down to Hebron to see her.

She would hardly be able to take so long a journey by herself—it was nearly a hundred miles,—but perhaps there would be a caravan starting from Nazareth at the

time, and she would go with it for the greater part of the way.

When she arrived at Hebron she would climb the winding, rocky path which led to where the house of Elisabeth stood, and as she entered in at the doorway Elisabeth would hear her gentle voice raised in the beautiful form of greeting common among the Jews, 'Peace be unto you,' and would rise to embrace her with words of loving welcome.

Elisabeth's first words show that God's Holy Spirit had already made it known to her that Mary was to be the mother of Jesus.

She calls her 'blessed' just as the angel Gabriel had done, and speaks of her unworthiness to receive into her house one who is to become the mother of her Lord.

And then, in answer to her words, the heart of Mary that has been so long brimming over with thankfulness and joy overflows at last. She lifts up her voice in the glad strains of that most beautiful of all hymns, known to us by its Latin name of the Magnificat, or 'song of the heart that gives God glory.'

'My soul doth magnify the Lord : and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.

For He hath regarded : the lowliness of His handmaiden.

For behold, from henceforth : all generations shall call me blessed.

For he that is mighty hath magnified me : and holy is His Name.

And His mercy is on them that fear Him : throughout all generations.

He hath shewed strength with His arm : He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

He hath put down the mighty from their seat : and hath exalted the humble and meek.

He hath filled the hungry with good things : and the rich He hath sent empty away.

He remembering His mercy hath holpen His servant Israel : as He promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his seed for ever.'

BIRTH OF THE KING'S FORERUNNER 15

So Mary sings her song of praise to God in words that can never die, and in her words we seem to hear the voice of the whole Church all down the ages singing too, and thanking God for the gift of His dear Son, and praising Him for all the blessings His coming brought.

Mary remained in Hebron for three months and then she went back again to Nazareth.

Soon afterwards the little son the angel had promised Zacharias was born. What happy hearts there were that day in the old priest's home ! How Zacharias and Elisabeth must have poured out their hearts in thankfulness to God for His dear gift, which must have seemed all the more precious because it had been so long in coming !

Zacharias had not yet recovered the use of his speech, but he was soon to do so. Presently the appointed day drew round for the little child to receive his name and to be made a member of the Jewish Church. It was a grand occasion, and many of the old priest's friends and neighbours had come to be present at the ceremony and to offer their good wishes.

Every one seems to have taken it for granted that the child would receive the name of Zacharias after his father, and this name was just about to be given him ; but Elisabeth had learnt about the angel's visit and the command he had given, and when the priest was about to name the child she stopped him, saying, ' Not so ; but he shall be called John.'

The friends were perplexed at this strange proceeding. Zacharias was a good name ; it had been borne by one of the great prophets of old, and by many of the priests of God. But Elisabeth would not give way, and so they turned to Zacharias himself. He could not speak, and so he made signs for a writing tablet to be brought him.

'They bring him a tablet covered with wax, with a sharp pointed instrument with which to write upon it; and Zacharias takes it and writes, and when they come to read the writing they find the words, 'His name is John.'

And now since Zacharias had shown his faith in the angel's words by obediently carrying out his command, God gives him back the speech He had taken away from him because of his unbelief, and the first words he utters are words of thankfulness and praise just as Mary's had been—

'Blessed be the Lord God of Israel : for He hath visited and redeemed
His people,
And hath raised up a mighty salvation for us : in the house of His
servant David ;
As He spake by the mouth of His holy Prophets : which have been
since the world began ;
That we should be saved from our enemies : and from the hands of all
that hate us ;
To perform the mercy promised to our forefathers : and to remember
His holy Covenant ;
To perform the oath which He sware to our forefather Abraham : that
He would give us ;
That we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies : might serve
Him without fear ;
In holiness and righteousness before Him : all the days of our life.
And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest : for thou
shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways ;
To give knowledge of salvation unto His people : for the remission
of their sins,
Through the tender mercy of our God : whereby the Dayspring from
on high hath visited us ;
To give light to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of
death : and to guide our feet into the way of peace.'

After this we hear no more of Zacharias and Elisabeth. They would feel they had little left to desire, now that God had granted their prayers and given them a

son. Their life work in any case would soon be at an end, and presently God would call them away from their earthly home to the better home of Paradise.

Did they live long enough to tell the little St. John the story of his birth, and to begin to train him for the work God had in store for him, the work of witnessing for Jesus and living a brave, unselfish, and heroic life?

We cannot tell. The Bible is silent about St. John's early years, just as it is silent, as we shall presently see, about the early life of Jesus. The old painters love to paint St. John as a little lad with lambskin coat and shepherd's crook playing at the side of the infant Jesus, but we do not know for certain that St. John ever saw Jesus when he was a child. All we can say is that, if he had no earthly teachers, God at any rate taught him; and trained in His school he grew up to be one of the most splendid characters of the whole Bible. Meanwhile, as St. Luke tells us, he 'was in the deserts till the day of his shewing forth to Israel.'

III

BETHLEHEM

AND now let us see how the King of Glory came. It was a strange and wonderful coming, the most strange and wonderful the world had ever seen or dreamt of, for it was the coming of God into the world. And to think that the form He chose to take should be the form of a little helpless child!

When Mary went back to Nazareth she did not tell the carpenter Joseph, to whom she was betrothed, the wonderful news the angel had brought her. The secret she had learnt lay hidden in her heart, like a sweet flower pressed between the pages of some holy book. God Himself, however, revealed the truth to Joseph. As the carpenter lies asleep one night he sees an angel in his dream, and the angel tells him that Mary is to become the mother of God's Son, and that the Holy Child is to be called Jesus, 'for He shall save His people from their sins.'

Soon after this Joseph took Mary to his home. It was only a poor, rough dwelling-place, but it was the home of a good man, and Mary would seek its shelter with glad and thankful heart. Very reverently and tenderly would Joseph watch over the fair young maiden whom God had intrusted to his care until the time should come for him to act as guardian of the Heavenly Child as well. That time was now very near at hand.

It was winter, and the roads and lanes of Palestine were all alive and astir with travelling companies. Little groups of men and women on foot or in caravans were passing and repassing one another all day long on their way to the different villages and towns. For a great census, or numbering of the people, was taking place throughout the whole world by command of the Roman Emperor, and every Jew must go to have his name written down in the town or village in which he was born, or to which his family belonged.

The Bible tells us that Joseph and Mary, though only poor peasant people, really belonged to the royal house of Judah. They traced their descent from David, Israel's greatest king, and since their great forefather had been born in the little village of Bethlehem of Judæa, they were obliged to make their way down from Nazareth to Bethlehem in order that the Emperor's orders might be carried out.

Bethlehem is some eighty miles distant from Nazareth, and it would take them quite four or five days to reach it, for they would be obliged to travel very slowly. We can picture them on their way to the south country—Joseph on foot with his staff in his hand, and loving, gentle Mary by his side in her cloak of blue, riding on an ass.

Many the busy cities and famous towns they would pass through after leaving Nazareth—Jezreel, once the capital of wicked King Ahab; Dothan, in whose fields the brethren of Joseph fed their flocks; Shiloh, where the child Samuel ministered before the Lord clad in his linen ephod; Bethel, where Jacob slept with a stone for his pillow and dreamed of the golden ladder and the angels.

These and many other famous places they would see,

until at last Jerusalem, 'the City of the Great King,' with its splendid Temple and its shining towers, would rise before their eyes, and they would climb the rocky heights upon which it stood, and stand with glad and thankful hearts within its gates.

And now their journey would be almost done. It was growing dusk, and the purple twilight was already gathering in the distant west, when perhaps they would catch their first glimpse of Bethlehem. We can imagine the joy with which they would gaze on the scene before them—the long ridge of hills with the little white town resting peacefully upon it like a dove brooding upon its nest. How thankful they would be when the roadway, winding up through many a terrace of silvery olive-trees and grape vines bursting into leaf, brought them at last into the steep and narrow streets of the little village.

They would easily find their way to the village khan or inn, for there would be a lantern slung on a rope in front of the entrance as a guide to travellers. But when they reached the inn and asked for shelter they found they had come too late. Every room was full. At least this is what the innkeeper tells them. Perhaps he sees that they are poor, with little money to spend, and there are so many important people to be attended to. Rich traders travelling like princes, their camels' necks all hung with chains of gold, corn merchants from Alexandria, whose swift ships have brought them over the sea as far as Cæsarea, learned doctors of the law, nobles who claim descent from kings of old, and many more. Why should he trouble himself about two poor, unknown strangers such as they?

And yet, they are travel-stained and weary, and he cannot find it in his heart to turn them quite away. The inn of Bethlehem was a sort of hollow square, built of

rough blocks of stone, with arched chambers running all round it, where the guests could spread their sleeping mats and take their meals. It rested against the green hillside, and near it was a cave scooped out of the rock, which served as a stable for the beasts. Mary and Joseph are told they may rest if it pleases them in this cave. It would at any rate be a refuge from the cold, and there was clear water to drink, and the straw was clean.

And so, thankful even for such a poor shelter as this, they turn their steps to the stable and enter in. And that night Jesus is born.

Think of it. Jesus, the King of Glory, by whom all things were made, came into the world that first Christmas night a tiny baby. The Lord of Heaven and Earth stooped to be born in a stable. We could not have dreamed of such a wonderful thing as this had we not been told about it. And yet it happened just as I have said. God became Man. He took our nature upon Him in order that He might bring the lost world back again to Himself. There was nothing to draw Him down from Heaven except His love. But He loved us and wanted to save us, and so He came. How startled the guests in that little inn of Bethlehem would have been had they known about His coming. But no one brought them the news. Only Mary and the angels knew.

There are some very old stories, called legends, which tell us that many wonderful things happened at Jesus' birth. One of these old stories says that at the moment when Jesus was born everything in nature suddenly stopped still as though under a spell—birds in the air with outspread wings, sheep in the act of browsing upon the mountains, cattle with necks stretched out to drink, all quite still and motionless.

While yet another story tells us how the oxen and asses of the cave came and knelt before the Infant Jesus, and owned Him as their maker. But these are not Bible stories, and we need not linger over them. Had you entered that lowly cave on the first Christmas night you would not have noticed anything very wonderful—just a young mother bending tenderly over a little child wrapped in swaddling bands and lying in a manger. Only the stable was full of angels, we may be sure of that. Jesus, we like to think, always went about attended by the holy angels, and they would not be absent at His birth. St. Michael in his golden armour would be there, and Gabriel with his lily. All the hosts of Heaven would come crowding in, ‘for when He bringeth the First-begotten into the world He saith, And let all the angels of God worship Him.’

But it is time for us to think of another scene outside the stable where Jesus lies. Lying out on the hills around Bethlehem on Christmas night were a great number of shepherds, keeping guard over their many flocks of sheep. For the pasture land of Bethlehem was good, and it was there that the sheep and lambs which were used for the Temple sacrifices were chiefly reared. Now it was to a little group of these shepherds that God saw fit first to announce the birth of Jesus Christ. They had led their sheep into the shelter of the fold and had lighted a fire near the watch-tower to scare off any wild beast that might be prowling around, and now they were sleeping, some of them, with their heads muffled in their long striped cloaks, while others took their turn in keeping watch. Nothing stirred. It was all quite still and peaceful. The silver moon was shining over the hills and the great stars were looking down from Heaven, just as they had looked down night after night upon David



THE ANGEL AND THE SHEPHERDS

the shepherd lad as he guarded his sheep upon the same hills so many hundreds of years before. The only sound to be heard was now and again the bleating of a lamb or the distant bark of a sheep-dog.

But now a wonderful thing happened. Suddenly a great light from Heaven shines all around these shepherds, dazzling their eyes and lighting up the place where they were with strange, unearthly brightness. They look up, and slowly out of the glory around them comes the pure and lovely form of a great angel. Terrified and bewildered, they fall upon their faces, and then the angel speaks, and his voice is sweet and his words are full of comfort. He tells them not to be afraid, for he has come to bring them glad tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. Jesus had come, the Saviour so long expected. God had sent His Son at last. He had been born that very night at Bethlehem.

And then he gives them a sign whereby they may know that this is so. 'Ye shall find the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.' So his message ends, and lo! as he ceases, the gates of Heaven roll back and the whole sky grows white with silver wings, and the air is full of the sound of angel voices praising God, and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men.' It was the first Christmas carol. The world had never heard a song like that before.

'It came upon the midnight clear,
That glorious song of old,
From angels bending near the earth
To touch their harps of gold.
Peace on the earth, good will to men,
From Heaven's all-gracious King—
The world in solemn stillness lay
To hear the angels sing.'

And now, this lovely song at an end, the angels went back again to Heaven as suddenly as they had come, and the glory that lay upon the hills died out and there were only the great white stars to be seen looking down from the sky as before.

How full of joy and wonder the hearts of the shepherds must have been we can only dimly guess. Their one thought was to go at once to Bethlehem to see whether it was really as the angel had said. They could not wait till morning. There in the distance still twinkled the lights of Bethlehem; and so, girding their cloaks around them, they make their way up the hill until they find themselves in the well-known street where the inn was.

And there in the stable just as the angel had said they found Joseph and Mary, and the little Child lying in the manger. There was no ring of golden mist about His head, no burning light streamed from His tender body. He looked just like any other baby. But they did not mind that. In that little helpless Child 'they, the shepherds, saw the Good Shepherd who came to lay down His life for the sheep.' They believed the angel's words, and kneeling down beside His cradle, and joining their rough hands together, they worshipped Him, and returned to their watch-tower, praising and blessing God for all they had heard and seen at Bethlehem.



THE VISIT OF THE SHEPHERDS

IV

THE CIRCUMCISION AND PRESENTATION IN THE TEMPLE

For some time Joseph and Mary lived quietly on in the little town where Jesus was born. They would soon be able to find another and a better shelter than the stable, although at best it would be but a very humble lodging.

Jesus from the very first willed to live a life of poverty. 'Though He was rich,' says St. Peter, 'yet for our sakes He became poor.' He remained poor all His life. Later on, when He grew up to be a great Teacher, He was without a home at all, for we read that when one who wanted to become His disciple said to Him, 'Master, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest,' He answered sadly, 'The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head.'

But though the lodging might be poor and bare there was always Mary's love to brighten and gladden it, and clasped to her tender breast the little Jesus would feel neither cold nor hunger.

Very tenderly would Mary watch over her little Child as He lay in her arms looking up at her with His grave, wide-open eyes. When He cried—for He would cry at times—she would rock Him to sleep, singing the while perhaps, with sweet, low voice, snatches from one of the old Psalms. When He awoke from sleep she would be at hand to minister to His every need. And all the while her heart would throb and tremble with a great joy and

wonder, and over and over again she would thank the great God for His goodness in choosing her out of all the world to be the mother of His dear Son.

And so the first week of Jesus' earthly life passed by.

On the eighth day He was circumcised. Every little Jewish boy was circumcised when he was eight days old. Circumcision was the solemn rite by which he was admitted into the Jewish Church, and bound over to serve God and keep His commandments; it was at his circumcision too that he received his name. On the eighth day then Jesus was either taken into the little Bethlehem synagogue or else carried across the hills to the Temple, to be made 'obedient' in this way 'to the law.' There was no difficulty about His name, for Mary would not forget the angel's message, 'Thou shalt call His name JESUS.'

Joshua or Jesus was a common name among the Jews, and it would excite no wonder that Mary's Child should be called by it. No one would guess how far greater than Joshua, the brave captain of the hosts of Israel, the new Joshua would prove; how far more wonderful would be His life and death; how far more splendid and lasting the victories He would win.

Thirty-three days later Mary, accompanied by Joseph, went up to the Temple to return thanks openly to God and to make Him an offering, as the Jewish law directed every mother to do at the birth of her little child. Leaving Bethlehem very early in the morning, they would reach the Temple gates just as the silver trumpets pealed forth for the morning service, and the Temple choir was preparing to chant the psalm for the day to the music of the Temple band.

They would make their way through the outer gate into the lowest and largest court on which the marble

cloisters opened, when, no doubt, they would find other mothers waiting, bound on the same errand as Mary was. There they would rest awhile, until presently the great gate that opened into the inner court swung slowly open and a band of white-robed Levites would appear to receive the various offerings that had been brought, and to carry them away to be burned on the great Temple altar of unhewn stone, when the morning sacrifice was at an end.

By the Jewish law every mother was expected to bring a lamb with her as an offering, but if she was not rich enough to buy a lamb she was allowed to bring a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons instead.

Now Joseph was only a poor village carpenter, and so although a lamb would not have cost very much, Mary was obliged to be content with two white doves as her offering. She would perhaps bring them in a wicker basket from Bethlehem, or what is more likely would buy them at the Temple itself, for there was a Temple officer, we are told, who used to keep flocks of pigeons on purpose to sell to those who needed them for such sacrifices as hers.

And yet though Mary could not afford to offer a lamb she had really something far more precious and wonderful to offer, for 'she who was too poor to bring a lamb brings with her the true Lamb, the Lamb of God.'

Yes, for all the while the little Jesus lay in her arms.

Mary had not only come to offer a sacrifice for herself; she had brought Jesus to be presented in the Temple as well—the little 'Lamb of God without blemish and without spot.'

For this was another custom among the Jews. Every first-born son must be brought to be presented to the Lord forty days after his birth. It was God's way of remind-

ing the Jews that all their children belonged to Him by right and that He claimed their service and their devotion as His due. The custom was a very old one. It had come down from the time when the children of Israel were bondmen in the iron furnace of Egypt. God, you remember, had sent His Angel of Pestilence and had slain all the first-born in the land on account of the sin of Pharaoh. But He had spared His own people. By the direction of Moses they had sprinkled the lintel and the side-posts of the houses with blood, and when the angel saw the blood-marks he passed over the houses with sheathed sword.

To keep in memory this great deliverance, God ordained that every first-born son should be set aside as belonging in a special way to Himself. And so the custom arose for every mother to bring her first little boy to God's House directly he was old enough, and present him to God to serve as a priest in His Holy Temple.

By paying a few silver coins into the Temple treasury, however, it was possible to redeem or buy back the child that had been offered in this way to God.

The father and mother would bring their little baby and lay him before the priest and tell him that they had brought their first-born son to dedicate him to God. The priest would then ask them if it was their wish to redeem the child, and on their answering 'yes' he would take the five pieces of silver they offered him and give the child back into his mother's arms, first of all laying his hand on its head, with the prayer that God would bless and guard the child and keep it from all evil and bring it in the end to His everlasting kingdom. Joseph and Mary presented the little Jesus in this way, and when the money had been paid and the blessing had been given they turned to leave the Temple.



THE PRESENTATION IN THE TEMPLE

There would be many worshippers passing to and fro amid the marble cloisters, but Mary and her Child would attract little notice. Those who glanced at her could see only a poor peasant woman from Galilee holding a little peasant child to her breast. But there were two people at least whose eyes God touched and to whom He gave the gift of vision. One was the old man Simeon. We are not told much about him in the Bible. Simply that he was a good man—one who loved God and his neighbour, and went regularly to the Temple to worship God. For many years he had lived his quiet, uneventful life in Jerusalem, seeking to brighten the lot of the sorrowful and the poor around him, and doing his best to serve God faithfully and well. The grand world knew little about Simeon, but God thought well of him, so well that He granted him a privilege He denied to others. He gave him the welcome promise that he should not die until his eyes had been gladdened by the sight of the Saviour of the world.

Years passed on and Simeon's eyes began to grow dim and the sands of his life were beginning to run out. Still there was God's promise ever before him like some bright star seen through the branches of a wood, and he often pondered over it and looked forward with steadfast heart to the hour of its fulfilment.

There must have been much—especially now that he was growing old, and there was no sign of Jesus' coming—to tempt him to lose heart at times, but through all the passing years he still held fast to his faith. God had promised—that was enough for him. Deep down in his heart those words of David made for themselves a home, 'Hope thou in the Lord and keep His way, and He shall bring it to pass.'

And God does bring it to pass.

One day he comes into the Temple according to his usual custom. But it is no accident that has led him there at this particular time; it is God who directs the old man's steps. While he is there, lifting up his heart in earnest prayer to God—asking Him perhaps to hasten the Saviour's coming or give him patience to wait for it—lo! a little Child passes by in the arms of his mother. She is a poor working woman, and her husband, who walks by her side, seems by his dress to be a carpenter; but something—Some One—speaks to Simeon's heart and tells him that the crowning moment of his life has come, that Jesus, 'the Desire of the Nations,' is before him. And the old man rises to his feet and comes forward and takes the Child into his trembling arms.

Long and earnestly he gazes into His face, while tears of joy run down his withered cheeks. Oh, how good God has been to him! how He has blessed him in granting him a vision that all the long line of Israel's prophets and kings had desired to see and had never seen. He can die happy now. There is nothing left to live for after this. And as he gazes, his joy finds utterance in glad words of thankfulness and praise, and he bursts forth into the lovely strains of the hymn which we know by its Latin name of the 'Nunc Dimittis':

'Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according
to Thy Word:
For mine eyes have seen Thy salvation,
Which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people;
To be a light to lighten the Gentiles: and to be the glory
of Thy people Israel.'

So Simeon raises his song of thankfulness to God, and now he turns to Mary who is standing by and watching

him with her wondering eyes, and his words take a sadder tone.

He tells her that while some would believe on her little Child and take Him for their Saviour, others would reject Him and so lose the gift of pardon and of life. He came to bring; that Jesus' path would be a hard and thorny one to tread, and that He would meet with ill-will and hatred instead of a loving welcome from the world. 'He was willing with all His heart' to save. And then Simeon adds strange words about a sword, which he says shall pierce through Mary's soul. What did he mean? we wonder. I think, dear child, God must have shown him the picture of a cross upon a hill and a poor mother standing beneath it, broken-hearted because her Son was in pain and dying, and she could only stand and look and look and do nothing to help Him. The cross was the Cross of Jesus, and the mother standing there was Mary herself. It was a prophecy, spoken, you see, at the very beginning of Jesus' earthly life, of the cruel death He was afterwards to die.

What Mary thought of Simeon's words we are not told, but for the first time a shadow must have fallen on her gentle heart—the shadow of the cross of which Simeon spoke. Hitherto she had been so proud and happy. Never a thought or dream of sorrow or of pain had come to her in connection with her little child, but now God would begin to make her understand that Jesus' life would not be all joy and sunshine, but that suffering and sadness must mingle with it, and that in the end it would be dark with the shadows of seeming failure and of death.

Slowly and painfully Mary was to learn that lesson, but God gave her strength and courage to learn it, and we know how her sorrow was turned into joy at last when

the gloom and sadness of Good Friday passed away, and the light and glory of the first Easter morning broke upon the world.

And now, as Simeon makes an end of speaking, an old woman, bent low with years, named Anna, draws near. She too had caught sight of the Christ Child, and to her as well as to Simeon it was revealed that the Lord whom she had been longing all her life to see had that morning suddenly come to His Temple. She was a widow and belonged to the tribe of Aser, the 'happy' tribe whose home of old lay in the same beautiful north country from which Joseph and Mary had come, a country bright with the silver of many olive-trees, and smiling with its sunny cornfields and long stretches of clustering vines.

Like Simeon, she had learnt to love God's House with all her heart, and to find her best and greatest joy in its services. Indeed, St. Luke tells us she never left the Temple, 'but served God' there 'with fastings and prayers night and day.' And now, just as she is about to die, He who is the glory of the Temple reveals Himself to her, and the place in which He chooses to appear is just the very place where all her life she had sought His presence—

'Oh, how amiable are Thy dwellings, Thou Lord of hosts !
My soul hath a desire and longing to enter into the courts
of the Lord : my heart and my flesh rejoice in the living God.
Yea, the sparrow hath found her an house
And the swallow a nest where she may lay her young,
Even Thy altars, O Lord of Hosts, my King and my God.
Blessed are they who dwell in Thy House :
They will be always praising Thee.'

So David sang of old, and as we think of Anna we cannot help echoing his words. She, too, dwelt in God's House, and she was blest in dwelling there. For did not

God give her the best blessing of all? He showed her the face of Jesus. How could she help praising Him for His goodness? And so she too, like Simeon, 'gave thanks unto the Lord,' and having seen Jesus in the Temple, went about telling the glad news that He had come, to all those who, like herself, had long been waiting and watching for His appearance.

V

THE VISIT OF THE WISE MEN—THE MURDER OF THE INNOCENTS

WE have seen how a few poor shepherds were the first to welcome the new-born King as He lay in the manger of Bethlehem. Soon afterwards God sent the Christ Child other visitors—men greater and of higher rank than they—who came from a land very far off to kneel beside His cradle and do Him homage. These were the wise men from the East. You remember how the old man Simeon in the Temple foretold that Jesus should be a Light to lighten the Gentiles, as well as the Glory of His people Israel. God in other words revealed to him the great truth that the little Child he held in his arms had come not only as the Saviour of the Jews but of the whole world. This truth was no new one indeed. We find it shining in letters of gold upon the pages of many a psalm and prophecy written hundreds of years before Christ came. Perhaps, for example, as Simeon spoke, he was thinking of the prophet Isaiah's words, 'And He said, It is a light thing that Thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob. . . . I will also give Thee for a Light to the Gentiles that Thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.'

But in course of time the Jews had lost sight of God's purpose. They thought of the Christ who should come in the light of a Deliverer, who belonged by rights to

themselves alone, and it was to teach the old lesson again to a people that had almost forgotten it, that God put it into the heart of certain wise men to leave their home beyond the eastern mountains, and to make the journey of which we are about to think.

Who the wise men were we do not know. Some have thought that they were eastern kings, clad in jewelled robes and wearing crowns of gold upon their heads. Bede, an old Anglo-Saxon chronicler and monk, not only tells us that they were kings, but even gives us their names and describes their appearance. They were three in number, he says, and their names were Melchior, Caspar, and Balthasar. The first was an old man with snow-white hair and beard, the second a ruddy, slender youth, the third a man swarthy and strong and in the prime of life.

The Bible, however, simply calls them 'wise,' and says they came from the East. Of one thing, however, about them we may be quite sure, and that is that they were not idolaters, but worshippers of the one true God. It was with them just as it had been with Simeon. Because they were true-hearted, holy men, God crowned their lives by showing them His Son. They lived up to the light He gave them, and it led them at last to the Light of life.

The wise men seem to have known something at any rate of the history of the promise. In their far-off home—whether among the flat, sandy plains of Babylon or in the beautiful flowery land of Persia—rumours had reached them of the great Deliverer who was about to come. A prophet named Balaam, many hundreds of years before, had proclaimed upon the mountains of Moab that a Star should come out of Jacob, and a Sceptre should rise out of Israel. Perhaps the memory of his words still lingered

in the East, and the wise men had pondered over them, and were eagerly awaiting some sign that their fulfilment was near at hand.

One night God gives them this sign. He sends them a message by a star.

From the earliest times the nations of the East had loved to study the heavens, and note the order and movements of the stars. It was a common belief that the stars influenced mens' lives, and that the birth of princes, and the fate of kings, and all kinds of wonderful events could be foretold by keeping a watch upon them, as hour by hour they threaded their way through the trackless heavens, moved by the invisible hand of God. Now it may well have happened that the wise men were engaged in this very study on the night I am thinking of.

Darkness had fallen; innumerable stars were beginning to dint the purple sky with their tiny silver points, when suddenly a new and lovely star, quite unlike any they have ever seen before, swims into sight. As they gaze in wonder, God in some mysterious way makes known to them that it is the herald of Jesus' birth, and they understand that the Desire of the nations has come at last, and that the star has been sent to guide them to His feet.

What a wonderful star that must have been! There is a legend which tells us that it was like a ball of fire, very large and bright, and that as the wise men gazed upon it in awe and wonder, they saw the form of a little Child within it, and over Him the sign of the holy cross. And it goes on to say that a voice spoke to them from the star, and bade them journey forth to the land of Judæa.

But whatever the form or appearance of the star, the wise men had no doubt that God had sent it, and at once they made up their minds to follow it into the unknown

West, whither it seemed to be beckoning them. There would be many difficulties in the way of such a journey. If they were really of princely rank it would not be an easy thing to leave their country and its affairs of state at a moment's notice. There would be many to bid them stay and worship the new-born King at home—many to point out the perils of the unknown way, and the uncertainty of a safe return. But nothing could shake the faith, no difficulty daunt the hearts of these brave God-fearing men. The King had come and they must go to pay Him homage. And so the preparations for the journey are set on foot. They gather rich and costly presents, they pack their tents and their provisions for the way on the backs of swift camels, and accompanied by their attendants they set out across the desert. It was a rough and perilous journey. They would have to ford swift rivers and climb many rocky passes, as well as pass through long and apparently endless stretches of desert sand, with no spreading palm-trees under which to rest, or wells from which to draw water for their camels. The hot sun would beat down upon them with its pitiless rays; they would be in danger from the wild beast and the desert robber. But they braved all dangers and endured every hardship, upheld by the hope of seeing the King.

At last the forest-clad mountains of 'the Land,' as the Jews loved to call their country, begin to rise in the blue distance, and by and by they reach Judæa.

They went straight to Jerusalem. It was the capital of the country, and they would naturally expect to find the King somewhere within its gates. There would be much to interest and astonish them as they caught their first glimpses of its towering walls and lofty terraces. Coming from the flat East it would rise before them like some great mountain fortress; and as they drew nearer

the green and silver of the fig and olive trees that clung about its sides, and the gold and glitter of its great Temple, would fill with delight eyes that had looked so long on bare rock and yellow desert sand.

But what perhaps would strike them most with wonder would be to find the city so peaceful and undisturbed.

The birth of a King is no everyday event. At such a time the trumpets peal and flags are flung out; there are gathering crowds in the streets, and signs of rejoicing on every side.

But in Jerusalem there are none of these things, and when they ask for news of the King they had come to seek, no one has even heard of Him. Their story and eager questionings only cause perplexity and alarm.

At last Herod, in his great white palace on the hill, hears of the mysterious visitors. Herod was King of the Jews at this time, ruling under the Romans, who were the real masters of the country. He was an old and very wicked king, hated and feared by the Jews over whom he ruled, on account of his many deeds of cruelty; and when he heard of the errand on which the wise men had come he was filled with dread. He was afraid lest this King, of whose birth the wise men spoke, might grow up to be his rival, and in the end seize his crown and throne. He did not know that Jesus had come to wear a crown of thorns, and that the only throne He longed to win was the throne of His people's hearts.

And so in his perplexity and alarm Herod summons the chief priests and scribes—the leaders of religion—and enquires of them where it had been foretold by the prophets that Christ should be born. With one voice they reply that the prophets had written that Christ should be born at Bethlehem, and they quote the

prophecy of Micah, 'And thou, Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor that shall rule My people Israel.'

Herod did not wish the Jews to suspect that he was troubled and ill at ease, and so he sends for the wise men secretly, and with kindly words and pretended sympathy bids them tell him the story of the wondrous star; questioning them anxiously as to the exact time of its appearing, in the hope of getting a clue to the date of Jesus' birth. He then sent them away, bidding them go to Bethlehem, and when they had found the young Child, bring him word again, when he too would go and worship Him.

It was a lie he told them—this old, white-haired, wicked king—for all the while he was plotting in his heart how best he might seize and destroy the Child Jesus. Only the wise men did not know this at the time.

And so they leave the royal palace, and, gathering their attendants together, presently the long string of camels with their rich trappings is seen passing through the streets of Jerusalem on the way to Bethlehem.

No one goes with them. There is no one, not even a single priest of the Temple, who seems to know or care about the King they had come so far to seek. What could it mean? It all seems very strange and sad. But still they go on bravely, sure that God will fulfil His promise in the end. And as they go, suddenly they look up, and lo! there is the star they had seen in the East, shining in the clear blue sky above their heads, going before them, leading the way just as the pillar of fire went before the Israelites of old on their way to the Promised Land. O the joy that fills their hearts! They know now in spite of the coldness and unbelief of

the Jews, that their journey could not be in vain. How could they doubt it with the star before their eyes?

And so they follow the star as it moves slowly before them, until Bethlehem is reached, when it descends and hangs like a silver lamp over the house where the young Child lay.

'And when they were come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother.' God had brought them into the presence of the King.

But how unlike a King! No beautiful palace roof stretched above His head—only the rough rafters of a humble cottage. No gold or purple, no silver cradle, only common rough linen bands and the humble throne of a poor mother's lap. Yet they bowed themselves at the Star Child's feet. Although he seemed so poor, they knew that He was indeed a King. Although He was without a throne, they knew He had come to set up a throne and a kingdom which never should be moved nor pass away. And so they knelt before Him and worshipped Him, just as the shepherds had done, and, opening their treasures, presented unto Him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. These were the best things their land produced, and they were given, each of them, with a purpose.

'Gold a monarch to declare,
Frankincense that God is there,
Myrrh to tell a heavier tale
Of His tomb and funeral.'

And then, having made their offerings, with glad and joyous hearts, the wise men turn their faces once more towards the East.

They did not return to Jerusalem. God warned them in a dream of Herod's wicked purpose to destroy

the Holy Child, and so they made their way back by another way.

What happened when they reached their far-off home once more—whether they became missionaries for Jesus Christ and died in His service—whether they afterwards learned the wondrous story of His Cross and Passion, His precious Death and Burial, His glorious Resurrection and Ascension, we are not told. Quietly, mysteriously, they come into the gospel story; quietly, mysteriously, they disappear. But the memory of their coming would never quite die out in the Home of Nazareth afterwards. It would be one of those things which Mary would ponder over in her heart. As a little child Jesus would often hear the story from her lips, and perhaps it was in memory of the sign God sent the wise men, that we find Him calling Himself long afterwards by one of His most beautiful names, ‘I am the bright and morning Star.’

And now let us go back to Jerusalem. When the days passed by, and there came no news of the wise men, Herod felt he had been tricked, and his rage and fury became very great. In his anger and fear the thought of a very cruel deed slowly shaped itself in his mind. He had no means of finding out in which of all the many Bethlehem homes the little Christ Child lay, and so he determined to kill every little boy in the village of two years old and under, thinking in this way that he would be sure to get rid of Jesus.

It was a cunning plan, but God did not suffer it to succeed. Those who fight against God are always sure to fail. One night as he lay asleep an angel stood by Joseph’s bed and spoke to him in his dream, and bade him take the young Child and Mary His mother and flee away to Egypt, ‘for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him.’ And so Joseph and Mary were

able to leave Bethlehem before Herod had time to carry out his plan. Hastily they arose, and Mary wrapping the little Jesus in her warm cloak, while Joseph saddled the ass and took his staff in hand, they fared out upon the hills beneath the star-lit sky, until by and by they were far beyond the reach of Herod's cruelty.

Then one day a troop of Herod's soldiers with their swords by their sides ride jingling down the Bethlehem valley. Everything is quiet and peaceful in the little village. The smith is at work in his forge, his little furnace glowing by his side; the potter is turning his wheel, surrounded by his jars of red and black and blue; the wine-seller with his wine-skin bottles and big earthen jars is seated at his stall; pleasantest sight of all, little happy children are to be seen playing and laughing in the streets.

Suddenly a cry is raised that soldiers are coming, and people crowd out to see the brave sight of Herod's men at arms. The children are the first to gather around; when suddenly swords flash, and first one and then another little one is pitilessly cut down.

In a moment all is terror and confusion. Men shout, the mothers run to catch up their little ones and try to escape. But the soldiers follow them. They force their way into every house. Wherever a little boy of tender years is found he is cruelly put to death.

Oh, how many sad hearts, how many desolate homes there would be that night in little Bethlehem; what sounds of bitter weeping would be heard in chambers where mothers bent over the bodies of their little murdered children!

You will say that this is a sad story, and so it is. It is always sad to hear of the death of little children, even when death does not come in a terrible form as it did in



THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT

the case of the Holy Innocents. And yet we must try to look beyond the sadness, the weeping, and the pain. In a great poem called 'The Ring and the Book,' the poet makes one of his characters speak of a poor, ill-treated, dying girl as a rose gathered for the breast of God. Is not that a beautiful thought? So when the children of Bethlehem died, God took care of them. He gathered them up in His arms, just as one gathers up the flowers. 'I saw a beautiful angel walking up and down the earth. He touched the aged and they became young. He touched the poor and they became rich. He touched the sorrowful and their faces became radiant with joy.

"Who is this beautiful being wandering up and down the earth?" I said. They told me his name was Death.'

Let me tell you a story I once read, as I end this chapter. It is the story of a boy whose little sister lay dying. Some one told him that, if he could gather one single leaf from the tree of life that grew in the Garden of God, his sister would be healed of her sickness. And so he set out to find the garden, and when after many weary wanderings he had found it, he drew near to the gate and begged the angel sentinel who stood there with stern face and flaming sword to let him have but one leaf from the tree of life to save his sister. And the angel asked the boy if he could promise that his sister should never be sick any more if he granted his request, and that she should never be unhappy, nor do wrong, nor be cold or hungry, nor be treated harshly. And the boy said he could not promise it. Then said the angel, 'Draw nearer,' and the boy drew nearer; and the angel opened the gate a little way, bidding the child look into the garden for a moment, in order that he might catch a glimpse of the silver lilies dreaming by the still waters, and the purple

passion flowers, and lovely roses, and all the beauty and the peace that lay within. 'Then if thou still wouldst wish for the leaf,' said the angel, 'I myself will make request of the King, and the leaf shall be thine.'

And the boy looked in and saw all the wondrous beauty and blessedness within the gate, and his lips trembled and his eyes grew dim and wistful, and he answered softly and said to the angel, 'I will not ask for the leaf. There is no place in the world so beautiful as this. There is no friend so kind as the Angel of Death.'

And so let us think of the Holy Innocents as going that day to be with God in His beautiful Garden of Paradise. They died for Jesus, and God took them to Himself, in that fair land where the flowers never fade, and where shadows of suffering or of sin can never fall.

VI

THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT—THE NAZARETH LIFE

THE way to Egypt which Joseph and Mary took lay for the first few miles across the hills. It then descended into the great fertile plain known to the Jews as 'the Low Country,' which stretched along the shores of the blue Mediterranean, or 'great sea' as it was then called.

Theirs would not be a journey over the trackless desert, as in the case of the wise men, for they would travel by the great coast road which ran between Egypt and Palestine. Nor would it be a solitary journey like theirs, for the road to Egypt was a famous trade route, and there would be many caravans passing along with camels, carrying spices and jewels and rich stuffs from the cities of the East, and returning laden with bags of corn and alum, and great bales of muslin and linen yarn upon their backs. Fear of pursuit by the soldiers of Herod would make the Holy Family travel quickly, and they would reach Egypt three days after leaving Bethlehem.

Many legends have gathered around this journey of Joseph and Mary and the Infant Jesus. One of these is so beautiful that I must try to find room for it. The soldiers of Herod, it tells us, followed the travellers in fierce pursuit, and at one time nearly caught them up. To escape their enemies, Joseph and Mary turned aside and fled through a field of standing wheat. And

as they went, the wheat closed up behind them, so that no trace of their passage was to be seen. Presently the soldiers came hot-foot on the Holy Family's track. Halting, they bade the reapers answer whether a man and woman and little child had not but just before passed through the field. For answer, the reapers pointed to the flawless sea of golden grain which stretched before them. 'Ask the wheat,' they said. 'Can travellers pass through a cornfield as birds breast the air, and leave no trace of their passage behind them?'

Then the soldiers rode off, and, throwing down their sickles, the reapers hastened after Joseph and Mary. And when they had overtaken them they knelt with bowed heads before the Holy Child, and He blessed them, making the sign of the cross over them with uplifted hand.

Arrived in Egypt, Joseph no doubt at once made his way to one of the towns, to seek for work at his trade in order to earn money to support Mary and the Child Jesus, until God should see fit to call them home again. Egypt must have seemed a strange place to Joseph and Mary. It was a country very unlike Judæa with its rugged hills and wooded valleys. It was a fair level land, running like a broad green ribbon through the desert, and divided by the waters of the river Nile, 'Mother of Harvests,' whose overflowing waters gave the land its colouring of tender green.

And yet, though a flat country, there was much that was interesting and beautiful in Egypt. It was a land of clear distances, of lovely rose-coloured sunsets and fair unclouded skies. It was a land, too, of great buildings. On every side all kinds of rare and curious monuments were to be seen. Splendid palaces lifted themselves in

air, their walls and columns gay with painted figures; great temples ranged themselves along the river-banks, full of strange gods with heads of animals and birds.

Most wonderful sight of all, towering above palace and temple alike, and looking out over the whirling desert sand, rose the giant pyramids, tombs of the ancient Egyptian Kings, the wonder of the world.

But beautiful and full of interest though it might be, Egypt could only be a land of exile for Joseph and Mary, and the life there would be strange, and their hearts would often turn with longing towards their village home in far-off Judæa.

At last God calls them back, and the message comes as before in a dream. Again it is night, and Joseph is asleep, and as he sleeps an angel touches him, and he hears the welcome words: 'Arise, and take the young Child and Mary His mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young Child's life.'

And so once more Joseph and Mary set forth upon their homeward journey, and soon Egypt, with its palm-trees and palaces and mighty pyramids, is left behind. It is always good to return home again after exile in a foreign land, and the hearts of Mary and Joseph must have rejoiced as they retraced the way they had trodden in such sadness and alarm nearly three years before. The borders of Judæa would soon be reached, and then they would climb the rocky hills that led to Hebron, on their way back to Bethlehem. But before they had gone far the news reaches them that although Herod, the wicked king, their enemy, was dead, his son Archelaus reigned in his stead, and the news makes them afraid lest danger still threatened the Holy Child. In their doubt and perplexity their thoughts go back to the old home at Nazareth among the blue Galilean hills, and turning

aside, they again descend into the plain, and make their way towards the north country by the road running along the coast.

Galilee, the country towards which they were traveling, was quite the most beautiful part of the Holy Land, although it was despised by the Jews of the south, who called it 'Galilee of the Gentiles,' because it was the home of so many foreign peoples. The Canaanites and many other warlike tribes had never been quite driven out from its mountains, and there were many merchants from Greece and Assyria, and from the neighbouring cities of Phœnicia, who had settled within its borders for the purposes of trade. But the country itself was the garden of Palestine, full of fair mountains and grassy plains. Great forests of oak and olive gave colour to its hills; the fig-tree and the almond blossomed in its orchards, and its valleys and plains rippled and waved with the swaying corn. The village of Nazareth, the home of Joseph and Mary, lay like a white flower in the midst of this beautiful garden country. It was a little village at the end of a narrow valley, shut in by the green hills which folded about it 'like the petals of a rose.' Here Joseph and Mary had their home, and it was here that Jesus lived for nearly thirty years, till God called Him forth to tread the bitter road which led Him to the Cross. How much we should like to have a history of those years—

'The sinless years
That breathed beneath the Syrian blue.'

But the Bible drops a curtain of silence over them all, and only lifts it once to show us the Boy Jesus going up to the Temple when He was twelve years old. It is Jesus' work in blessing and saving the world that God would have us think most about.

And yet it will do us no harm to picture to ourselves—if we do it reverently—the kind of life Jesus would live in the Nazareth home, before He began that short, sad journey of His which led Him to the Cross.

His would be the free and happy life of the country child, lived in the open air and among the trees and flowers. Nazareth was full of flowers, and there seems therefore a certain fitness in its becoming the home of One whom Solomon calls ‘the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the valleys.’ In spring-time the fields and glades were a blaze of colour. The red anemone, the cactus with its silken blooms, the scarlet tulip, rock roses white and yellow, the pink convolvulus, and purple orchis—these and many other beautiful flowers grew everywhere; and Jesus, we may be sure, would love to wander in the fields where they grew, and gather them in His arms, and drink in their loveliness and fragrance. At times He would wander away among the woods and listen to the song of the birds, and watch them build their nests among the branches. Then summer would come, and He would mark how the corn grew white upon the hills, and follow with His eyes the great velvet butterflies that flitted like living jewels among the flowers.

Later still would come the time of the gathering of grapes, and then He would see the purple clusters gathered and carried to the wine-fats, and the olive berries stripped from the trees and borne away in great baskets to be pressed into oil.

Sometimes again, He would climb the hills and look out with wistful eyes upon the great outside world. There, away to the north, the peak of giant Hermon could be plainly seen, powdered with snow, and sparkling like silver in the sun. To the east, His eyes would rest upon green Mount Tabor; to the south, upon the hill country

of Moab so dim and blue. Away again to the west, the long white line of waves breaking upon the distant shore would be faintly seen; while, close at hand, stretched the great plain of Esdraelon, 'in bands of grey and yellow like a Persian carpet on which the clouds make patches of deep violet.' These, and many other such sights the Child Jesus would see, as with reverent hand He turned the pages of 'God's Great Green Book' which lay open before Him; and the pictures He saw would sink into His heart, and colour His speech, and would all help to mould and influence His character. For just as the water takes its colour from the sky and reflects the branches of the trees that bend above it, so to a great extent we take our character from our surroundings. And that is why a good man tells us never if possible to lose any opportunity of seeing anything beautiful. 'Beauty,' he says, 'is God's handwriting—a wayside Sacrament; welcome it in every fair face, every fair sky, every fair flower, and thank Him for it, who is the Fountain of all loveliness, and drink it in, simply and earnestly, with all your eyes; it is a charmed draught, a cup of blessing.'

And then there would be His home life. The Nazareth home—should we not like to have seen it? We can fancy it to ourselves—just a little white house nestling against the slope of the hill, surrounded by green fig-trees, and with clambering vines upon the walls. There Mary would sit and spin, and weave the coarse white linen dress that Jesus wore during the summer days, or make Him His little sheepskin coat to keep Him warm when winter came. There, too, Joseph, when the rain swept down the valley, would bring his carpenter's bench and tools, and set to work to make chairs and tables.



THE WORKSHOP OF NAZARETH

There would not be much in the way of furniture in the little dimly-lighted room in which they lived—just a great painted chest, a stool or two, some sleeping-rugs, and a few great earthen jars. Standing by the door would be the drinking pitcher full of bright water, and fastened to the door-post the little metal box, containing the parchment strips with verses from God's Word written upon them, which every one on coming in and going out would reverently touch. On the outside of the house—not inside as with us—would run the staircase, leading up to the flat roof; and there Joseph and Mary and the little Jesus would sit in the cool of the evening to catch the breeze that blew across the hills, and there they would often kneel in prayer to their Heavenly Father and His.

Jesus would soon learn to be of use to His mother and Joseph. When He grew old enough He would help Mary by carrying water from the village well, and aid her in a hundred other thoughtful ways. Joseph, no doubt, would teach Him how to handle the saw and chisel, and He would help him to make the ox-goads for the farmers, and handles for their ploughs; for every Jewish boy was taught to do some useful work, and there was a common saying among the Jews that 'he who did not teach his son a trade taught him to become a robber.'

Then there would be the holy lessons learned at Mary's knee. Does it not seem strange to think of God's Son learning such lessons there? Yet God, His Heavenly Father, willed Him to grow up step by step and little by little in knowledge of Heavenly things, just like any other child. So Mary would join His little hands together in prayer, and morning and evening would hear Him say His 'reminder' verses, as they were called—texts from the Holy Scriptures which every little Jewish boy must learn as soon as he was five years old.

Later on He would go to school at the synagogue, and learn to read and write, and recite passages from the Scriptures.

In the winter-time there would be His seat by the fire at Mary's side, and then Joseph would tell Him wonderful stories from Jewish history ; for it was the duty of every Jewish father to teach his children the history of their land and nation.

Jesus would hear from him how God came to choose the Jews from among all the nations of the earth to be His own peculiar people, and how He loved them and befriended them, and bare them on eagles' wings, and brought them unto Himself. He would speak of the passage of the Red Sea, and tell of the fall of the mighty Jericho ; how Dagon, the fish-god of the Philistines, bowed himself before the Ark of God ; and how, when the hosts of the King of Assyria came up against Jerusalem, the Spirit of the Lord lifted up a banner against them, and scattered them, as the wind scatters the withered leaves of autumn. There would be stories too about the splendid heroes and saints of old time whom God raised up to do His work. Abraham, to whom the Promise first came ; Moses, the great lawgiver, whose grave on lonely Nebo the angels digged ; Daniel, who faced death in the den of lions rather than give up his prayers. Joseph, moving through dark ways with the white flower of innocence ever at his breast, would not be forgotten ; nor David, the shepherd lad and sweet singer of Israel, who lived to wear the royal purple and write the grandest songs the world has ever heard.

Then on Sabbath days (and at other times as well) there would be the visit to the Synagogue, or Parish Church as we might almost call it, and Jesus would stand at Joseph's side and join with His childish voice in the prayers, and see the silken curtains drawn back from

before the ark in which the sacred Scriptures were kept, and watch the great parchment rolls brought out. At every service there was a reading from the Law of Moses and the prophets, and Jesus would listen with great attention to the holy words as they fell from the reader's lips, and ponder over them and treasure them in His heart.

In some such fashion as this the days of Nazareth would pass by, and all the while Jesus was increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man. He was preparing Himself for the great work to which God, His Heavenly Father, had called Him; He was getting ready for the Cross and strengthening Himself to bear its heavy weight.

And now let us gather up one or two thoughts about this Nazareth life of which we have been thinking.

First, we have seen it was the life of a little human child.

We think of Jesus as the Son of God, but it is good to think of Him as the Son of Mary too. He had a human body like ours, He had a human mind. He felt hunger and pain and weariness just as all children at times must do. 'He tabernacled in a tent like our own,' says an old writer, 'and of the same pattern'; and another writer speaks of Him as growing just as other children grow, only in a childhood of stainless and sinless beauty 'as the flowers of roses in the spring of the year and as lilies by the waters.' And so, since Jesus has been a child, we know that He can feel for little children, and enter into all their sorrows and their joys.

But not only so, it was the life of a poor child, and so a very simple one. If you look at some of the great pictures which painters of old have painted of Mary and the Infant Jesus, you will see how often they paint them

on a splendid throne, with robes of gold and jewelled crowns. But Mary was poor, and could not have afforded rich jewels for herself, or a robe of gold for her little Child, even had she desired them. Jesus wore the common dress of the little peasant child, He ate the common black barley bread of the country people. He had no expensive pleasures, only the very simplest ones. And yet He was quite happy. And so He teaches us that it is not the things we have that bring us happiness, but rather the character we form for ourselves and the kind of life we lead.

Then, too, it was a life of service. From the time He was a little child He learned to work with His hands, and to do His best to help others. He helped Mary with her tasks. He worked with Joseph in his shop; and so by working He ennobled common life and made all labour honourable. By and by God called Him to higher and more important service; but whatever His Father gave him to do He did it thoroughly and well and with all His might. He was faithful not only in the great things of life but in the very little ones as well—

‘Never in a costly palace did I rest on golden bed,
Never in a hermit’s cavern have I eaten idle bread.

‘Born within a lowly stable where the cattle round Me stood,
Trained a carpenter in Nazareth, I have toiled and found it good.

‘They who tread the path of labour follow where My feet have trod,
They who work without complaining do the holy will of God

Once more, it was a life of obedience. Children sometimes think it hard to have to obey, and yet here we have the Son of God Himself learning the lesson of obedience—that lesson so difficult and yet so necessary to learn. Not only was He obedient to the will of His Heavenly Father, He obeyed His earthly parents in all things, He

bent His will to theirs. He carried out their every wish without a murmur, and always in a spirit of cheerful and loving readiness.

Above all it was a life of perfect sinlessness. Sin! —that was the only thing in which He differed from you and me. He never did anything wrong. He was—

‘ A Son who never did amiss,
Who never shamed his mother’s kiss;’

a child whose thoughts were always pure, and whose words were ever kind and gentle. If you stand at evening-time by the shore of some mountain lake when the stars are shining, and look down into the water, you will see the violet mantle of the sky with all its gold embroidery reflected as clearly as in some fairy glass. So we look at Jesus and we see all the light and beauty of Heaven shining in His life. It was radiant and stainless from end to end. We look into it as we look into the waters of a lake, and it gives us back the stars.

Dear child, there is a hymn which tells us that Jesus is our childhood’s pattern, and it is true. God sent the little Child of Nazareth to show us into what He would have us grow. It is the work of all our lives to follow in His steps.

A good man tells us that he once saw a picture of Joseph’s workshop, in which the Holy Child was painted holding a line to guide the carpenter as he sawed the wood, whilst the shavings fell at His feet in the form of a cross.

And he tells us how he could not help thinking what a true picture it was of the work which Jesus came to do, and how He holds the line of duty for all little children, and guides them in safety along the straight and narrow way.

It is the same thought which one of the old prophets had—‘ A little Child shall lead them.’

‘ And our eyes at last shall see Him
Through His own redeeming love,
For that Child so dear and gentle
Is our Lord in Heaven above ;
And He leads His children on
To the place where He is gone.’

VII

THE VISIT TO THE TEMPLE

I SAID, when speaking of the Home at Nazareth, that God's hand has drawn a curtain over the childhood of Jesus. Only once is that curtain raised, when the picture we are shown is that of a little Lad going up for the first time to Jerusalem to keep the Feast of the Passover.

Jesus would often have heard from the lips of Mary the story of the three great festivals which every true-hearted Jew was bound to observe at the Temple at Jerusalem; the Feast of the Passover, the Feast of Pentecost or Ingathering, and the Feast of Tabernacles. He must often have seen the caravans start from Nazareth to keep the feasts, with Joseph among the other travellers, and He would look forward longingly to the time when He should be old enough to join the happy procession Himself, and behold with His own eyes the dear city of whose glory and splendour He had heard so much—'To behold the fair beauty of the Lord and to visit His Temple.'

And now that time had come. He was twelve years old, and at twelve years old every little boy was considered by the Jews to be of age. He was called 'a Son of the Law'; he was privileged to wear upon his forehead and left arm the 'phylacteries,' as they were called—little leather boxes containing parchment slips with verses

from the Law of Moses written upon them; best of all, he was allowed to go up to Jerusalem with the rest, and to keep the feasts like any grown-up man.

Joseph and Mary, St. Luke tells us, went up to Jerusalem every year to keep the Passover, and now that the time had come round again for their yearly visit, they arranged to take the Child Jesus with them.

The little Nazareth village would be astir some days before the caravan started, for it was a long journey that faced the travellers, and there would be many preparations to be made. Provisions would have to be stored for the way, tents and bedding packed, horses and mules gathered together. Then, when everything was ready, at a given signal the start would be made, and the long procession would slowly move down the valley to the sound of singing and flute-playing, and stream away across the blue hills towards the south.

It was the most beautiful time of the whole year. Everywhere the cornfields spread, turning the great plain of Esdraelon, through which the road led at first, into a very field of the cloth of gold. Everywhere the flowers were springing, and the soft air was full of the song of birds. Roses twined among the hedgerows; the poppies stood waist high among the corn; by the roadside the tulip blew its blood-red bubble, and banks were white with cyclamen and the 'Star of Bethlehem.' Through this lovely, flower-enamelled country the long caravan moved slowly onwards, with Jesus in the midst, now riding by Mary's side, now walking by the side of Joseph. The road along which they passed would be familiar enough to most of the pilgrims, but to Jesus it would be all new and strange and very wonderful. He had perhaps never strayed beyond the Nazareth valley before; His furthest hilltop view had been bounded by the hills

of Samaria, and these had been but dimly seen. Now it was like going out into the wide world.

As the procession advanced it would be joined by other caravans on their way to Jerusalem, and, as the numbers swelled, so louder and more joyously would swell the 'Songs of Ascent' as they were called—songs which David wrote of old, and which the pilgrims loved to chant as they went up to the House of the Lord.

'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help.'

And again—

'I was glad when they said unto me, We will go into the House of the Lord.

Our feet shall stand in thy gates, O Jerusalem.

Jerusalem is built as a city that is at unity in itself.

For thither the tribes go up, even the tribes of the Lord,

To testify unto Israel, to give thanks unto the Name of the Lord.'

So, with a voice of singing, first fair Galilee and then Samaria by degrees would be left behind, and the far Judæan hills would at last be gained. Presently all eyes would be strained to catch the first glimpse of the Holy City, and when at last it looms in the distance—'the stately city with its dreaming spires'—every heart would beat high with joy and longing. To the Jew there was no city in all the world to be compared to Jerusalem, the city 'beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth.' To tread its streets, to worship in its holy Temple, was to him the highest joy of life. Its very walls and soil were holy. Wherever he went he kept its memory green within his heart, whenever he prayed it was always as Daniel prayed, 'with his windows open, looking towards Jerusalem.'

And so the pilgrims would rejoice as the towers and

spires of the city began to show faintly against the background of the sky, and Jesus too must have rejoiced with the rest. To see Jerusalem for the first time would be a great event in His life. As He gazed on the distant prospect, His thoughts would travel back to dim and far-off times, and many of the old stories which Joseph used to tell Him about the Holy City would rise up in His mind. That hill to the right must surely be Mount Moriah, up whose side Abraham led his dear son Isaac, with the wood for the sacrifice bound upon his back; that other, Mount Zion, the strong hill David had wrested from the Jebusites, and to which he had brought the Ark of God with singing and dancing. There, perhaps on the very spot where now the great dome faintly glowed, once had stood the Temple of Solomon, splendid in ivory and marble and beaten gold—the wonder of the world; there the second Temple which took its place after the Jews had returned from captivity, a Temple splendid indeed, but not so splendid as the first, at whose opening the old men wept, remembering the glories of the former House.

And all the while the pilgrim band would be drawing nearer, and the view of the city would be growing more distinct, till by and by the marble walls and golden roofs of the Temple would be seen quite clearly; with the great Castle of Antonia at its side, where the Roman soldiers kept guard, and the shining towers of Herod's palace girdling the rocky heights below. And now the road would begin to dip downwards towards the city walls, and the caravan would enter Jerusalem by the great Damascus gate. There a wonderful sight awaited them. The city would present the appearance of a great fair, for not only would there be visitors from every town and village in the country, but from nearly every part of

the world as well—from Phœnicia, from Syria, from Egypt, even from far-off Babylon. Gaily dressed, excited crowds thronged the streets. Everywhere bustle and confusion reigned, and the air was full of the sound of many voices. At the street corners traders were shouting their wares. In the market-place long strings of camels were being unladen, and the shepherds were gathering their lambs together to be taken to the Temple. Here would be seen a Roman soldier in his shining armour, elbowing a path for himself through the crowd that scowled at him as he went by, there a great doctor of the law in his flowing robes, before whom the people would reverently give way. Dresses of all colours, people of every class and description would be there; while dotted about on all sides would be seen countless numbers of little wicker booths, twined about with green branches, in which the pilgrims slept who could not find lodgings for themselves, and which were so numerous as to turn the city into a very garden.

The Holy Family, no doubt, would first of all seek to find shelter in some humble lodging-place. If this were out of the question, Joseph would set to work to make a booth for himself and Mary and the Child Jesus—which, as a carpenter, he would find no difficulty in doing,—and then they would rest for a while after their long journey. Next morning, very early, they would go to the Temple, and Jesus would gaze for the first time with eyes of wonder on its loveliness and beauty. Let me try to give you some idea of what this wonderful building was like.

It stood on one of the four hills upon which Jerusalem was built, the Mount Moriah, as it was called, crowning the very spot, it was supposed, where the Angel of Death sheathed his sword after wasting the city with pestilence in the reign of David. The top of the hill had been

enlarged by great piles of masonry to give room for the enormous block of buildings which rested upon it, and which rose, terrace after terrace, until it ended in a great house of white marble covered with plates of gold, 'dazzling as a flame and sometimes sparkling like snow.' Around the four sides of this great mass of buildings ran great cloisters of white marble with splendid cedar roofs and pavements of many-coloured stone, the largest of which lay on the south, and was greater and more magnificent, we are told, than the finest of our cathedrals.

To enter the Temple you had to pass through a great gate crowned with towers which led you into a large open court, known as the Court of the Gentiles. This was the first and the largest of all the Temple Courts, and was open to whoever might like to enter it. Men of all nations trod its pavements of variegated marble; while ranged along its walls were stalls where oxen and sheep were kept, ready to be sold for sacrifice, and little tables at which the money-changers sat and clinked their coins.

Inside this court, and separated from it by a low wall, which it was death for any one who was not a Jew to cross, came the Court of the Women. It was reached by a flight of steps and was a smaller court than the last. Here were the thirteen 'trumpets,' or money-chests, so called from their trumpet-like shape, into which the offerings in support of the Temple services were dropped. Here too, among the other doors which led out of the court, was the famous 'Beautiful Gate' of the Temple, made of fine Corinthian brass decorated with lilies and enriched with silver and gold. Another flight of steps, and another barrier, and the Court of Israel was reached, into which only Jewish men might enter. Inside this again was the Court of the Priests, with its altar of burnt offering and great polished brazen laver, or washing-bowl.

Last of all, beyond the Altar, the jewel of which all the rest were but the outer coverings, towered on high the beautiful white Sanctuary, or Holy House, itself, its roof studded with spikes of gold, with golden folding doors, and a great golden vine sculptured upon its front, trailing grape clusters six feet long. A lovely Babylonian curtain of blue and red and white and purple, beautifully embroidered in gold, divided it into two parts. The first part was called the Holy Place, and contained the table of shewbread, the golden seven-branched candlestick, and the golden altar of incense. The second part was known as the Holy of Holies, and contained—nothing. It was quite empty and quite dark. And yet this was the most sacred spot of all. It was God's Presence Chamber, set apart for Him alone. No one ever went there except the High Priest, and he only once a year, on the great Day of Atonement, to sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice, and to make intercession for the sins of the people. Such was the Temple which Jesus now saw for the first time. There were many other famous and beautiful buildings in Jerusalem—there was the great white marble palace of Herod, there were the stately castles he had built, there were the beautiful parks and pleasure-grounds he had laid out, and much else to interest and attract the eye—but nothing could be compared to this. If Jesus wandered about the city as He might have done, telling her towers and marking well her bulwarks, He would always be drawn back to the Temple. It was His Father's House, and His heart would go out to it in deep devotion. There would be nothing to interest Him so much as watching its services, no joy like that of joining in the prayers in the solemn hush at the offering up of the incense, or listening to the wise words of the gentle old men who taught the children in the courts, or taking

part in the sweet psalms, which the white-robed Levites sang, morning and evening, to the accompaniment of flute and harp and cymbal.

When the fourteenth day of the month came, Joseph bought the Passover lamb. At sunset it would be killed, and after it had been roasted the little Passover company would gather together, and, the Passover story having been retold, the lamb would be solemnly eaten with bitter herbs, and cakes of unleavened bread. Soon after this the Nazareth caravan would start for home.

The Passover Feast lasted seven days, but the first three days were really the important ones, and when these were over many of the pilgrims began to leave the city, especially if their homes lay far off. The start would be made at night, or at any rate early in the morning before it was light. Many other caravans would be leaving at the same time as the Nazareth one. The narrow streets would be full of torches and moving figures, and the shouting and the noise would be very great. We can understand that with so many people jostling one another it would be a very difficult thing for members of a large party to keep together; and so, in the din and confusion Jesus is left behind.

Mary and Joseph did not discover this at first. No doubt, when they were clear of the city and the press, they would notice He was not with them, but they would not be alarmed. 'He is with some of the others,' they would think; for the boys in a caravan would often wander away from their parents' sides to seek their play-mates, or to ride with other friends. But as night drew on, and they could find no trace of Him anywhere, they became alarmed, and early the next morning they left the caravan and went back to Jerusalem seeking Him.

Mary's heart by this time must have been filled with



JESUS AMONG THE DOCTORS

terror. The country was in a very unsettled state; there were many bad characters in Jerusalem itself, and many bands of robbers wandering about the country. What if Jesus had fallen into evil hands? What if He had been stolen away, like Joseph of old, and she should never see Him again? Quickly Jerusalem is reached, and the search for Jesus continues; but neither that day nor during the night, can any trace of Him be found. At last, almost in despair, Mary and Joseph wander into the Temple, and there, in one of the courts, they find Him, surrounded by a ring of doctors of the law, 'both hearing them and asking them questions.' The wise old men were looking at Him with wondering, admiring eyes. There was something so different about Him from all other children they had ever met. Such a holy light shone in His eyes; His face was so pure and beautiful; and when He spoke, His words were so wise, and showed such a deep and wonderful knowledge about Heavenly things, that they could not help being astonished.

Mary's heart must have given a great leap when she saw Him standing there. We seem to see her outstretched arms, and to hear the little cry of joy she gives. Yet she would not break in upon His lesson, or rudely tear Him away from His teachers, after her first sudden movement towards Him. She would just quietly wait until by and by she could catch His eye; and then He would leave them and come running joyfully to her side. Her gentle heart was still aching with the pain and anxiety she had gone through, and so when she speaks her words are sad, though full of tenderness. 'Son, why hast Thou thus dealt with us? Behold Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing,' she says. And Jesus looks at her with troubled gaze, grieved that He should have caused her pain, and yet wondering too. Why should

she have felt alarm? Why should she have been looking for Him as if He had been lost? 'Did ye not know that I must be in My Father's House?' It seemed so strange that they should think of Him as being anywhere but there. It seemed so strange that anything should be thought of more importance than His getting to learn about His Heavenly Father's will, and how best to carry it out. As Joseph and Mary listened to His words they did not understand them. They only felt that in some strange fashion He was drifting away beyond their reach. Their thoughts were no longer His. God had begun to reveal to Him the work to which He had been appointed; the call had come; the light of Heaven was fast breaking into His soul. He was no longer the Holy Child, 'He was the gentle, serious Boy, looking out into the great world beyond, and seeing there—a Cross!' And yet the time for His going out into the world had not yet come, and He was content to wait patiently until His father should call Him forth. And so, in all gentle humility, He went down with Joseph and Mary to Nazareth, 'and was subject unto them.' He remained there for eighteen years.

Dear child, we have been thinking of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. May we not see in this a parable of that other and longer journey of His, of which the first was but a type. I mean the journey of His earthly life, which began at Bethlehem, and led by way of the Calvary Cross to the Mount of the Ascension, and from thence up to the Jerusalem which is above, the beautiful Home He left when He came down to save the world. Yes, all His life was a journey. All His life He steadfastly set His face to go up to that Jerusalem. He never once turned aside; He never for a moment forgot that His true home lay there. And may we not see in it a parable of our own lives as well? For what is the life of

the Christian child after all but a going up to Jerusalem, a going up to where He now is, and by the same path He trod of old. There, far above our heads, it shines, the Beautiful City, all of pure gold like unto clear glass, with its gates of shining pearl and its foundations garnished with all manner of precious stones, with the glory of God to lighten it. Only, the way seems sometimes long, and the flowers do not always spring, and there are hard hills to be climbed, and the road is often rough. Yet the great Caravan of the Church moves on, and we are going with it. By and by, if we do not weary or turn aside, we shall reach the gates at last; and then all the bells of the City will ring out 'to welcome us thereto.'

'Jerusalem is built of gold,
Of crystal, pearl, and gem :
Oh fair thy lustres manifold,
Thou fair Jerusalem !
Thy citizens who walk in white
Have nought to do with day or night,
And drink the river of delight.

.

'Jerusalem where song nor gem
Nor fruit nor waters cease,
God bring us to Jerusalem,
God bring us home in peace !
The strong who stand, the weak who fall,
The first and last, the great and small,
Home one by one, home one and all.'

(CHRISTINA ROSETTI.)

BOOK II

THE SHINING LIGHT

‘ The quiet hills, the skies above,
The faces round were bright with love ;
He lost not in the tranquil place
One hint of wisdom or of grace ;
Not unobserved, nor vague, nor dim,
The secret of the world to Him,
The prayer He heard which Nature saith
In the still glades by Nazareth.

‘ Yet graver by the growth of years
The step, the face, the heart appears ;
The burden of the world He knows,
The unloved helper’s lonely woes,
Till, when the summons bids Him rise
From that still place of placid skies,
Fearless, yet sorrowing unto death,
Jesus goes forth from Nazareth.’

I

THE PREACHING OF THE KING'S FORERUNNER—

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

WE come now to the story of how the way of Jesus, the King, was prepared for Him by His Forerunner, St. John, and how He Himself was anointed and crowned before going forth to battle.

Thirty years had passed away since the birth of the little son of Zacharias and Elizabeth; and all this time St. John, like Jesus, had been living a life hidden from the world, preparing himself in secret for the work the angel had foretold he should do.

Unlike our Lord, however, he did not remain quietly at home. As soon as he understood what his work was to be, he left his pleasant abode among the green hills of Hebron, and wandered away into the desert, far from the haunts of men, to be alone with God.

Often in the history of the world, when a man has heard God's voice calling him to do some great work for Him, he has felt the need of withdrawing himself from the world for a time, and seeking some quiet place where he could be alone to think over the task God has set him, and pray about it and train himself to carry it out.

Sometimes the work has not taken very long to do in the end, and has been of a very simple kind; but without the quiet time spent alone with God it could not have been done at all.

So it was with St. John. He knew the voice would come to him one day, calling him to a post of honour in the army of the great King; he knew that he was to be the pioneer to go before Jesus, as in olden days pioneers were sent before the king with axe and hammer and spade, to make the road fit for his travelling. To prepare for this post he felt he must go apart, and train himself to endure hardness by prayer and fasting and lonely vigil.

And so he chose a desert life; and many years passed by and still he lived apart. Only those long years, spent alone with God, were not wasted years for all that. When the voice spoke at last, calling him forth to do his work, he did it faithfully and well. And it was his life in the desert which helped him to do it—to do it in the right way and at the right moment, and just as God willed it to be done.

The wilderness which St. John had chosen for his home was a sort of huge sunken valley, stretching away eastwards from the hill country of Judæa to the shores of the great 'Dead Sea,' as it was called, a desolate inland sea at the foot of Palestine, into which the river Jordan emptied its waters.

The Jews called it 'the Horror,' for it was the most lonely and dreary spot imaginable. As far as eye could reach nothing was to be seen but a stony waste of bare and rocky hilltops, all tumbled together in wild confusion, with steep ravines running in and out between them, where no trees grew and no sound of running water was ever heard. Hot, stifling winds blew across its surface. The snake's hiss and raven's croak by day, and the long-drawn howl of the wild beast by night, were the only sounds that ever broke its stillness.

Here, in some limestone cave among the rocks, St.

John took up his abode ; and here he lived his hard, wild, solitary life from day to day ; his only drink a draught of water from some hidden spring ; his only food the locusts of the desert, and the honey of wild bees that lived in the rocky cliffs.

At last God's voice spoke to him and told him that the hour had come for him to leave his lonely cell, and to go forth to proclaim the coming of the King. And so St. John went forth to preach and to teach, and soon the whole land was ringing with his fame.

The caravans that passed through the desert would be the first to spread abroad the tidings that a great prophet had arisen in the wilderness, and as the news spread the excitement grew, until great crowds from all parts of the country began to gather about him as he taught. From far-off Tyre and Sidon, from fair Jerusalem, from the rugged mountains of Judæa, from the towns and villages of Galilee, they came streaming forth to listen to the burning, fiery words of the new preacher.

There among the multitude might have been seen the proud Pharisee, in his long flowing tunic with its tassels of white and blue ; there too the high-born Sadducee with his sneering face, drawn to the desert by curiosity to see who this new prophet might be. Roman tax-gatherers, country farmers ; fishermen, labourers, soldiers ; high and low, good and bad, all sorts and conditions of men would be there. And St. John had a message for them all.

We seem to see him as he stands before them—the great stern prophet, whose name is on everybody's lips—his spare, gaunt form covered with a rough garment of camel's hair, his long, tangled locks falling in masses over his shoulders, his eyes flashing with strange unearthly light.

What wonderful sermons those were of his ! No-

body had ever heard anything like them before. The words seemed to come straight from his heart, and had the clear, brave ring of a silver trumpet. He did not wrap his message up in fine words; he spoke it just as God put it into his mouth, quite plainly and fearlessly; not minding if he gave offence, for he was afraid of no one in all the world but God.

Sin, and the need of true repentance for sin, that was the text from which he preached. He rebuked the Pharisee for his hypocrisy, and told him that broadening the fringes of his garments, and making long prayers for a pretence, would never save him. He rebuked the tax-collector for his cheating and lying, the soldier for his cruelty and discontent. He told the proud and self-satisfied among the people, that it was of little use their being proud of the fact that they were the children of Abraham, since God could raise up children to Abraham even from the desert stones. It was the character and the life God cared about, not the name or the long descent. Were they bringing forth good fruit in their lives? That was the question. If not, let them beware; for the woodman was on his way through the forest, and the fruitless trees had been marked, and the axe was being got ready.

And then he would go on to speak of the Kingdom of Heaven that the Christ, whose messenger he was, should soon set up on the earth, and of the new reign of righteousness and peace that was coming on. And as he spoke of this, men's eyes would kindle and their faces grow glad, for the times were evil, and wickedness and oppression reigned everywhere; and all hearts were longing for the coming of the King. He would tell of the glory and splendour of the Christ, and speak in humble tones of his own unworthiness even to carry the King's

sandals and serve Him as His slave ; he would tell of the great gift of the Holy Spirit the Christ should bring ; and the separation He would make between the evil and the good.

And the closing words of the great preacher would always be the same. Would they enter into Christ's Kingdom ? let them first repent them of their sins. The new kingdom was not for the sin-loving and disobedient ; they only could share its blessings whose hearts were right with God.

So St. John delivered his message, and his words went home to many a sinful heart. Crowds pressed around him confessing their sins, and beseeching him to show them how to get ready to receive the Christ. And then St. John would lead them down to the banks of the river Jordan, and pour water upon their heads in token that they were really sorry for their sins and intended henceforth to live new and better lives.

In this way St. John did his work in preparing men's hearts to receive Jesus, and so the King's highway was being got ready.

And all the while how humble the Baptist was ! He did not seek success or fame for himself. It was Christ the King of whose honour and glory he was always dreaming. Had he willed it he might have set himself up in the King's place, and there would have been thousands of people to believe in him, and to follow him to the death. But he would not do it. Once we are told how the Scribes and Pharisees of Jerusalem, who had heard of his wonderful doings, sent to ask him whether he were the Christ or no ; and his answer was that he was only a voice—a voice crying in the wilderness. He was willing to be nothing, that Christ might be everything. He only lived for the King.

Presently, as we shall see, the King came at last, and St. John's work being done he was content quietly to disappear; just as the morning star shines for a while in the darkness and then faints and grows dim at dawn, and at last melts away and is lost to sight altogether before the glory of the rising sun.

Meanwhile the news of the Baptist's wonderful work had reached Jesus in the lowly workshop of Nazareth, and He knew that the days of His waiting were now at an end. Good-bye, at last, to chisel and plane and the carpenter's bench; good-bye to the little white town among the hills, the quiet fields, the old familiar home! There before Him stretched the thorny path His feet must follow now, the hard steep path God had marked out for Him to tread, the path of self-sacrifice and of pain—the way of the Cross.

‘That evening when the Carpenter swept out
The fragrant shavings from the workshop floor,
And placed the tools in order, and shut to
And barred, for the last time, the humble door,
And going on His way to save the world
Turned from the labourer's lot for evermore,
I wonder—was he glad?’

‘That morning when the Carpenter walked forth
From Joseph's doorway in the glimmering light,
And bade His holy mother long farewell,
And through the rose-shot skies with dawning bright,
Saw glooming dark the shadows of the Cross,
Yet seeing, set His face towards Calvary's height,
I wonder—was He sad?’

I think there must have been sadness and gladness both at Jesus' heart. He would be sad, for He knew how slow the world would be to receive the message which He had come to bring; how hard and almost hopeless

He would find the task of winning it back to God ; how men would disbelieve and reject Him, and repay His love with cruelty and ill-will. And yet He would be filled with a great gladness too, for it was His Father's work He was going forth to do, and success must crown it in the end. First the sadness and disappointment and the seeming failure—then the victory and the song; darkness and the shadow of death now—afterwards the light of the Resurrection morning, and in the end, the glory of the new Heaven and the new Earth, with sin and death destroyed, and poor fallen man brought back again to God.

Jesus would only have His mother to whom to bid farewell, the day He went out into the world to begin the work which lay before Him. Good, patient, unselfish Joseph, who had guarded Him so tenderly and with such loving care when He was a little child, had no doubt by this time passed away. At any rate we never hear of him again after the return to Nazareth when Jesus was twelve years old.

Jesus travelled down to the south country by the old well-remembered road ; and everywhere as He passed along He would hear the people talking about St. John, and asking one another whether it was true that the Christ had really come.

Then, unnoticed and unknown, He appeared one day upon the banks of the Jordan, and mingled with the crowd that pressed around St. John to listen to his message. There face to face they stood at last—the herald and the King—only, St. John did not know Jesus. They had lived far apart from one another all these years, and he may never have even seen Him before.

By and by, for that day at least, the last warning

words are spoken, the last earnest appeal is made, and the Baptist makes his way down to the river, and standing among the shallows begins to baptize. One after another out of the great crowd presses forward confessing his sins and pledging himself henceforth to lead a new and better life, and St. John in every case pours water upon his head, as a sign of the solemn choice he has made to serve and follow God.

Then Jesus Himself draws near. Perhaps He had waited until all the rest had departed, in order to be alone with His servant. Now He comes forward and asks to be baptized just as the others had been.

St. John, as he looked upon Jesus and heard His words, was strangely troubled. There was something in His earnest piercing glance that seemed to read his very heart. Everything about Jesus—His calm and kingly bearing, the purity and splendour of that face which no shadow of sin had ever dimmed—spoke of a life lived in the very presence of God Himself, and St. John felt ashamed and humbled, he knew not why. Who could this holy Stranger be?

‘I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me?’ he asks. And Jesus answers ‘Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness’—as though He would say, ‘It is true I have no need to be baptized for I am the Son of God, but I am also the Son of Man, come to live man’s life and to be made like man in all things except sin—so that whatever the law ordains I will submit to. I will set an example of perfect obedience to all that God requires.’

And so St. John suffers Him and, entering into the water, Jesus is baptized. And lo! as the water falls upon His head, the blue veil of the sky is rent in twain and a wondrous shaft of light streams down, and, sailing



THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

upon its beams and lighting upon Him, comes the form of what looks like a beautiful white bird, 'a dove that is covered with silver wings and her feathers like gold.'

It was the Holy Spirit of God who had come to rest upon Jesus, to anoint Him and to crown Him for His work.

And then the solemn stillness is broken by a voice—the awful voice of the Father Himself speaking from Heaven, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'

And so John the herald knew that the King had come at last. And this is the witness he bore—'I saw the Spirit descending from Heaven like a dove, and it abode upon Him. . . . And I saw and bare record that this is the Son of God.'

II

HOW THE KING FOUGHT HIS BATTLE IN THE WILDERNESS

THE outpouring of God's Holy Spirit upon Jesus at His baptism marks the beginning of a new chapter in the story of The Wonderful Life.

He was now solemnly set apart for the great work He had come to do, as the Saviour of the world, and God had girded Him with strength to carry it out. He stood armed and ready: armed to face the difficulties and dangers, the hardships and disappointments that lay before Him; ready to go forward with brave and steadfast heart to tread the way of sorrow, and at last to climb the hill of the Cross upon whose top He knew He was soon to die.

But there was first a battle for Him to fight; an awful lonely battle, with no one but the angels to look on; in which He was to meet the great enemy of souls, the devil; and to have His armour tested and His strength tried to the very uttermost.

The evening had come on and the crowds had dispersed to their homes; John, too, had gone, and Jesus was left alone.

All kinds of great and wonderful thoughts were making music in His soul. He could not rest; He felt He must go apart to prepare for the task that lay before Him; to ponder over the message God had sent, and to let the meaning of the Heavenly vision sink into His heart. And

so He wandered away over the wild and dreary desert waste, to be alone with God.

For forty days and nights He wandered there, seeing no human form and hearing no human voice; the only curtain spread over Him at night, the jewelled mantle of the wide, wide sky; His only companions, the wild beasts that prowled around, but could not hurt Him, since God had shut their mouths.

So rapt in earnest prayer and holy thought was He, so near He trod to God and Heaven, that the earth seemed to fade away, and He felt neither thirst nor hunger; only a great longing to carry out His Heavenly Father's will, and finish the work He had given Him to do.

Thus the long days and nights went by almost unnoticed, and then Jesus came back to the things of everyday life once more.

After the great strain He had gone through, He was weak and faint and very hungry; and it was just at this moment that the devil drew near to tempt Him and try to catch Him in his net.

The devil, too, had been waiting all down the ages for the coming of the Saviour, only with fear and dread. He would not forget those stern words, spoken as he cowered before God in his snake's dress in Eden, warning him that the seed of the woman should bruise his head. Their meaning was, he knew, that a Saviour should be born one day into the world who should break his power. And now the Saviour had come, and this lonely wanderer in the desert, with the steadfast eyes and sad and earnest face, was He.

The time had arrived for the great struggle which should decide the final victory between good and evil; whether Christ's purpose in coming to save man should

succeed or whether it should be defeated ; whether in the end God should win the day or whether the devil should triumph again as he did in Eden.

Satan knew well that if he could tempt Jesus to commit one single sin, His power to save the world would be gone, and so he came prepared to use all the craft and cunning at his command to carry out his ends.

In what shape he came we do not know. The devil is a spirit, and perhaps he did not come in any visible form at all, but whispered his temptations into Jesus' ear unseen, and painted his bright attractive pictures before His eyes, just as he whispers in our ears to-day, and paints the pictures that make us long after the things that God forbids. Some have thought that he came as a glorious angel with radiant face, bringing pretended messages from Heaven ; some again that he came in the form of an ordinary traveller through the desert. The poet Milton, for instance, describes his appearance as that of an old man in homely garments—

‘As seemed in quest of some stray ewe,
Or withered sticks to gather.’

One thing, I think, at any rate we may be sure of, and it is this, that if the devil came in any bodily form at all it would be in some pleasing shape, and not in any dark and awful one. It was his aim to tempt and to deceive, and he would be anxious to put Jesus off His guard in every way he could.

And how did he set to work to try to lead Him into sin ? If we read the history of the Temptation we shall see what his plan was. It was to try to get Jesus to choose an easier, pleasanter path than the hard one God had marked out for Him ; to lead Him to take His own way instead of God's way ; ‘to make God His servant rather than Himself the servant of God.

The first temptation seemed an innocent one enough.

Jesus, I have said, was faint and hungry after His long fast and vigil, and scattered on the ground around Him were the numberless round flat stones of the desert. Perhaps as He looked at them He could not help thinking how much like little loaves of bread they seemed, and then the devil would whisper, 'Why not *make* them into loaves? You have the power to do this, if, as you say, you are the Son of God.' And Jesus had the power. It would have been quite as easy for Him to change stones into bread, as to turn water into wine, which we find Him doing afterwards at the marriage feast of Cana.

Why then did He not do it? Because it would have been a proof of weakness instead of strength. Jesus knew that His Father had not forgotten Him; He felt sure that He would send Him food to eat, in His own way and in His own good time, and that there was only need of patient waiting. Besides, though He was the Son of God, and so able to work a miracle for Himself had He liked, He would not forget that He was the Son of Man as well, and had come to live just as His brothers lived, and He would scorn to use a power to help Himself which they did not possess.

And so He answers the tempter in the words which Moses used in speaking to the Israelites of God's protecting care, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.' In other words, 'There are higher things than bread to think of; there is the life of the soul, there is the will of God to be taken into account. I put myself in God's hands, I am content to trust Him for what I need, just as My brothers have to do.'

Disappointed in his first attack, the devil thinks to

use this very trust in God, which Jesus shows, as a weapon of offence. He carries Him to Jerusalem and sets Him down on one of the pinnacles of the Temple; perhaps the topmost turret of the great porch which looked towards the East, and overhung the valley of Jehoshaphat, with the little brook Cedron shining at its foot; perhaps the summit of the tower from whence the priests looked out each morning at the dawn of day, to catch the first glint of gold upon the hills of Hebron, which was the signal for the morning sacrifice.

There upon some narrow ledge, high in air, with the ravens wheeling and screaming around them, they stood, the tempter and the Tempted; and as Jesus gazes into the dizzy depth below, He hears the devil's whisper, 'If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down; for it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning Thee; and in their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest at any time Thou dash Thy foot against a stone.'

It was as though he said, 'You were quite right just now to trust in God; well, here is another and an even more splendid way of showing your trust! Throw yourself down. God's angels will bear you up in their strong and loving hands and keep you safe.' But Jesus answers, 'Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.' It is wrong, that is to say, to presume on God's love and willingness to take care of you. It is a false trust to run into needless danger and expect His help. God promises safety to those who walk in the way of His commandments; not to those who follow paths of their own choosing.

Perhaps there was a further temptation wrapped up in the devil's words. There was an ancient tradition, it is said, among the Jews, that the Christ when He came would show Himself on the Temple ramparts at sunrise and proclaim Himself King. It may have been the hour



THE TEMPTATION

of sunrise when Jesus stood where He did. If so the Temple Courts below would be full of worshippers.

What if He really were to throw Himself down and be caught by angel hands? Would it not be a sign to the people that He really was the Christ? Would they not be dazzled at the wonderful sight; and would it not be an easy way of winning them over to believe in Him?

Yes, it would have been an easy way perhaps—only He had not come to choose easy ways for Himself. The right way, God's way, that was the way He had come to tread, and He willed to tread it to the end. And so once more He faces the strong temptation and conquers it; and for the second time the devil's purpose is defeated.

And now, like a desperate gambler, the tempter stakes everything on one last throw. 'The devil taketh Him,' St. Matthew tells us, 'up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto Him, All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me.'

What a splendid sight that must have been, when, as by the waving of a magician's wand, the splendour and glory of all the earth slowly unrolled itself before Jesus' eyes like the unrolling of some mighty scroll, set about with jewels and all ablaze with gold and colour.

And yet it was not upon the splendour and glory of the earth that Jesus' wistful eyes were fixed. All the riches of the world, all earthly rule and power and the many crowns of empire, were but poor bribes to Him who had given up the Kingdom of Heaven itself, to come down to earth to suffer and to die, and who had laid aside a crown more glorious far than any earthly king had ever worn.

He looked beyond and below all the glitter and the

pomp, as Satan meant He should do. It was not the world itself He wanted ; it was men's hearts, their love, their worship, their obedience that He craved. And it was just this that Satan seemed to offer Him. The devil claimed it all as ' Prince of this world,' and he offered to give it up, to renounce his claim in Jesus' favour, if Jesus would only accept the gift as coming from himself, and pay him in return one single act of homage.

To conquer the world, to win the hearts of men—why, this was the very thing which Jesus had left the glory of Heaven to do ; this was the great purpose of His life, the one desire of His heart. To give way would mean the setting up of His kingdom at once with no more need of waiting ; it would mean the crown without the conflict, the victory without the bitter fight.

And it could all be brought about so easily, as it seemed.

' The tears of all the helpless ones
Thou couldst not bear to see ;
" All power is Thine," the tempter said,
" If Thou wilt worship me.

" All will I give without the cross,
Without the bitter pain—
A world restored, a kingdom bought ;
Begin at once Thy reign." '

Ah ! but Jesus would not do evil that good might come. The temptation was there, but He thrust it away with all His might. It was what was asked of Him in return for the promised gift that showed Him the vision was not from God. He knew it never could be right to pay to another what God alone had a right to claim. And so, turning to the devil, seen at last in his true colours as the enemy of God, and His own great foe, He issues the stern command, ' Get thee hence, Satan : for it is

written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.'

'Then the devil leaveth Him,' baffled, disappointed, and cast down. The battle was at an end, and the King had come forth victorious. Oh, what joy there must have been in Heaven that day! How the angels of God who had wept over Adam's fall and the sight of a ruined world, must have rejoiced at the victory of the King! With anxious eyes they had watched the fight; and now that it was over, they brought Him food from Heaven in their hands, and gathering round Him tended Him in His weariness with gentle, loving ministry.

That night beneath the desert sky He slept a dreamless sleep; and mingled with the sighing of the desert wind you might have heard the rustling of the angels' wings.

Dear child, the story of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, and the victory He won there, is the story of the battle that awaits us all, and of the victory we too may win if we will only follow in His steps. Over and over again on the battlefield of the world the children of Jesus will have to fight the same hard fight He fought, against the same strong foe, who did his best to conquer Him of old. The temptations that met Him are sure to meet us too—temptations to doubt God's love and care, to leave the path He has marked out for us, for our own; to do wrong because it is easier than to do right—and to overcome these we shall have to fight very bravely. Let it hearten and encourage us to remember how Jesus fought. He did not use His heavenly armour, He took no advantage we could not have. He came down to our level. One pictures Him as some brave knight of old, leading his peasant soldiers on to battle, and putting off his suit of glittering mail and polished helmet, and laying aside his shield, to fight just as his brothers had to fight

who had none of these things to help them. So as He fought and conquered, we may hope to fight and conquer too. But more than this; if we keep close to Him He will help us, and we shall not fight alone.

There is a story told of King Henry of Navarre, how once when he was going into battle he bound a snow-white plume of feathers in his helmet, saying to his soldiers, 'If my standard-bearer falls, let this be your standard—it will lead you to victory.'

So our King goes before His soldiers to bring them on their way and give them good success.

'Courage, then,' says the old book of *The Imitation of Christ*, 'let us go forward together. Jesus will be with us. He will be our Helper, who is also our Guide and Forerunner. Behold our King entereth in before us, and He will fight for us.'

III

THE CALL OF THE FIRST DISCIPLES—HOW JESUS TURNED WATER INTO WINE AT THE MARRIAGE FEAST OF CANA

AFTER the first meeting between the herald and the King, St. John still continued his task of preaching and baptizing.

He was able now, however, to speak much more plainly to the people about the Christ. He could tell them that the King had really come at last; that he had seen Him with his own eyes, and that the lowly Jesus of Nazareth was He.

Jesus still lingered by the banks of the river Jordan, and twice at least St. John was able to point Him out to others—first to the crowd, as the King passed by one day while he was preaching, and the next day to two of his own disciples, when they were alone together. Both times John called Jesus by a strange and beautiful name. ‘Behold,’ he said to the crowd, ‘the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world’; and again to his disciples, ‘Behold the Lamb of God.’

Did St. John, we wonder, speak of Jesus as God’s Lamb because He came in such a meek and gentle guise, and seemed so pure and spotless? Perhaps so; but I think there was a deeper meaning still in his words. He was not only thinking and speaking of Jesus’ lovely character, but of the wonderful work He had come to do; his thoughts had begun to turn to the great Sacrifice

which was soon to be offered up on the Altar of the Cross.

Perhaps as he spoke his eye may have rested on a drove of lambs being led along to the Temple to be offered up at the morning and evening sacrifice, or at the Passover feast which was then coming on ; and the words of the old prophet Isaiah would flash across his mind, 'He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth. . . . Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. . . . And the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.' St. John knew that the Temple sacrifices could never take away sin. The only sacrifice that could really do this was the sacrifice of God's Son ; the sacrifice to which the world had been looking forward all down the ages, and of which all other sacrifices were only the dim and misty shadows. God had shown him this great truth, and now that Jesus had come, and the voice from Heaven had pointed Him out as the Son of God, St. John knew that the offering up of the Sacrifice was at hand. Jesus, he felt sure, was the true Lamb of God whose death should do what the sacrifice of all the lambs in the world could never do. He had come to take away the burden of man's sin ; He had come to reconcile the world to God.

The words St. John spoke made a great impression on the minds of his two disciples. They felt they would like to know more about this wonderful Stranger, whom their master had thus pointed out to them as the world's Sin-bearer ; and so as He moved away they followed Him. Jesus saw them following and invited them to His home. It was a little booth, no doubt, that home of His ; hardly large enough to hold three people. It stood perhaps among the willow-trees and rose-red oleanders

that fringed the river's bank, within sound of the rushing water; and His own hands had driven in the stakes, and twined the green boughs to make its walls, and stretched the striped awning over it which served it for a roof.

There the two disciples remained with Jesus for the rest of the afternoon, while He spoke His wonderful words to them about Himself, and answered the eager questions they put to Him. How quickly those afternoon hours must have passed by! What happiness it must have been simply to gaze upon Jesus' face and hear Him speak. The disciples of St. John felt henceforth there could be only one possible Master for them. Their hearts went out to Jesus as they had never gone out to any earthly teacher before.

You would like to know the names of these two disciples who thus left St. John to become the first followers of Jesus. The elder of the two was called Andrew. He was a fisherman from Galilee—like most fishermen, we may suppose, brave, keen-eyed, and strong of arm. The other of more slender build, with sweet and earnest face, was John. He was afterwards Jesus' favourite apostle, and bears in the Gospel the beautiful name of 'the disciple whom Jesus loved.'

St. Andrew had a brother called Simon, who was also a fisherman, and had doubtless, like himself, travelled down from Galilee to hear the preaching of St. John, and had become one of the disciples of the Baptist. No sooner had St. Andrew satisfied himself that Jesus was indeed the Christ, than he at once set out to find Simon and bring him to Jesus. That was always St. Andrew's way, as we shall see later on. He had the true missionary spirit; he always seems to have been on the look-out to bring some one to Jesus.

It was sunset when St. Andrew left the little booth

by the waterside to look for his brother, and when he had found him he brought him, eager-eyed and excited, into Jesus' presence.

Jesus looked at Simon very earnestly. He was only a common fisherman like St. Andrew, but there was something very frank and honest and likeable about his rugged, weather-beaten face, and Jesus could see a heart of gold beating beneath his rough fisherman's garb.

'You are Simon,' He said, 'the son of Jona (or the Dove). You shall be called Peter, the Rock.'

We often read in the Bible of a man's name being changed in token of a change that has taken place, or is about to take place, in his character or fortune. Perhaps Jesus gave Simon the name of Rock, because He foresaw what a grand rock-like character he would hammer out for himself in the end, and what a true devoted friend, 'except for one sad instant,' he would prove. Or perhaps it was because He had already marked him out as one of the great foundation-stones of His Church.

At any rate, by giving him the new name, Jesus showed Simon that there was a place awaiting him in His service, and that He had a work for him to do, and Simon at once came over to Jesus' side. The next day Jesus added another disciple to the three who had already joined Him. This was a young man, named Philip, who was perhaps a friend of Andrew and Peter, or may at any rate have been an acquaintance, as he came from the same place as they did—Bethsaida, 'the house of fish,' a little fishing village on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

With these four disciples as His followers, Jesus now went back to Galilee. He did not return to Nazareth, but went to stay at a little village a few miles off, called Cana.

St. Philip had a friend at Cana, and no sooner had

they arrived at their journey's end, than he went to look for him in order to tell him the glad news that the Saviour had come. 'We have found Him,' he cries eagerly, 'of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph.' Now this friend, whose name was Nathanael, did not believe his friend Philip at first; the news seemed too good to be true. What, the Christ come from a common little village like Nazareth! He could not believe it.

Philip did the best thing to persuade Nathanael that it was really as he said. He did not argue; he just said, 'Come and see.' He knew that if his friend only looked on Jesus' face and heard Him speak, he would not be able to help believing. And so Nathanael came. And when Jesus saw him coming, He looked on him with the same kindly, searching look He had bent upon Simon Peter, and said, 'Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!' In other words, 'Behold a true son of Jacob; a man honest and straightforward, and free from all shadow of deceit and double-dealing.'

Nathanael was surprised to hear Jesus speak about him as if He knew him, when, as he thought, He had never even seen him before. 'Whence knowest Thou me?' he asks; and Jesus tells him.

It was the custom among the Jews to go out into their gardens in the early morning to read and pray and meditate beneath the shade of some spreading fig-tree. Nathanael had been doing this that very morning. Perhaps as he sat beneath the fig-tree shade he had been thinking sadly of the Saviour who seemed so long in coming, and had been lifting his heart in earnest prayer to God to hasten the time of the great appearing, and to grant that, before he died, he might see the vision of Christ's face. And now Jesus recalls all this to his mind

by saying, 'Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee'; and something in His look tells Nathanael that Jesus' eye had been resting upon him at a time when he had thought himself quite alone, and that at that very moment it was reading the inmost secrets of his heart.

'Rabbi'—'Teacher,' he bursts out, 'Thou art the Son of God, Thou art the King of Israel.' And then Jesus rewards his faith by making him a promise. He tells him that hereafter he should see the Heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man. Would Nathanael understand these words? Not at first, I suppose; but he would afterwards.

Do you remember the wonderful vision that Jacob saw, when, footsore and weary, a wanderer and a fugitive from his father's home, he lay down to sleep at Bethel beneath the open sky? It was the vision of a shining ladder whose top reached to Heaven, and up and down whose golden rounds the white-robed angels came and went.

'That ladder,' Jesus seems to say, 'was a type or shadow of Myself. I am the true Golden Ladder, let down by the hand of God, to span the dark gulf that has opened out, through man's sin, between Heaven and earth. Just as Jacob saw Heaven opened, so you shall see it opened, to let in those I shall redeem by My death. Just as upon the dream-ladder he saw the angels, so you by faith shall see them too. You shall see angels going up to Heaven through Me, "the Way," bearing man's prayers to God; you shall see them coming down to earth again through Me "the Way," carrying God's answering gifts of pardon, healing, and of grace.'

Nathanael's name does not occur any more in the Gospel story, unless, as some have thought, he is men-

tioned later under the name of Bartholomew. If so, it would seem that he became one of the twelve apostles, and spent his life in the service of the King.

Soon after there was a wedding in the little village of Cana, and Jesus and His disciples were among the invited guests. Who the bride and bridegroom were we are not told; but they were friends of Jesus' mother, and Mary had come from Nazareth to be present at the marriage, and to help to get things ready for the wedding feast.

A Jewish marriage was always made the occasion of great rejoicings. On the day of the wedding, towards evening, the bridegroom and his friends, in their best and gayest robes, set out for the house of the bride, in order to escort her to her new home. They would find her waiting to receive them, dressed in white, and bedecked with all her fairest jewels. Flowers were twined in her long flowing hair; on her head she wore her bridal crown of gilded myrtle leaves; while a long thin veil concealed her face and fell almost to her feet.

A procession having been formed, the bride, accompanied by her maidens and her other friends, set off for the bridegroom's house. Before them went the musicians singing and playing upon their flutes and drums; bright lamps, slung upon poles, were carried by some of the girls; others bore garlands in their hands or waved green boughs of myrtle.

The bridegroom's house presented, as a rule, a splendid appearance. It was lighted up with candles; rich carpets covered the seats, and the tables were spread with all manner of tempting things to eat and drink, and decorated with lovely flowers.

The first event to take place was the marriage ceremony itself. The holiday-makers would not forget that marriage was a holy and a sacred thing, and a hush would

fall upon the merry, laughing throng, as the bride and bridegroom stood side by side, and made their promise to be faithful and true to one another as long as life should last; just as young man and maiden do to-day in the service of the Church. Then perhaps a prayer would be offered up, and after God's blessing had been asked on the newly-wedded pair, the feasting and merry-making would begin.

Sometimes the wedding feast lasted for one day, sometimes for two, often for as many as seven, according to the rank and wealth of the bridegroom; but as long as the food and wine lasted, the guests were made heartily welcome, and were pressed to eat and drink and to enjoy themselves to the utmost.

It was to a marriage ceremony of this kind that Jesus was invited. We might have thought, perhaps, that He would not have cared to come when music and feasting were going on. But Jesus was never One to frown on innocent pleasure or enjoyment. He was always glad to see people happy. There is an old legend which says that Jesus was never seen to smile, but I think He must have often smiled, especially when the little children came running to Him to walk by His side, as they would often do, or gathered at His feet as He sat and taught among the Syrian lilies. No, I like that other legend better which tells us that when He lived at Nazareth it was a common thing for people to say when things looked dark, and they were vexed and weighed down by any trouble or anxiety, 'Come, let us go and look on Mary's Son'; as though the mere sight of Jesus' face, so calm and peaceful and radiant, had power to chase away all gloomy shadows and bring back hope and courage to their hearts.

And so Jesus did not shrink from the gaiety and

brightness of the marriage feast at Cana. He came to the wedding, and adorned and beautified it with His presence. Nor did His coming bring any shade of gloom or sadness with it. As He moved among the wedding guests, with sweet grave smile, now saying a kindly word to one and now to another, every one would feel glad to have Him there. It would be the happiest and most joyous feast that Cana had ever known.

But now something happened which seemed likely to break up the party altogether. The feasting was at its height, when suddenly the wine failed; it ran short, and there was no more to offer to the guests. The news must have come as a severe shock to the bridegroom; for to invite one's friends to a wedding feast and not give them enough to eat and drink was considered among the Jews to be a great disgrace. What was to be done?

Mary, feeling for the distress of her friends, made her way quickly to where Jesus was, and told Him what had happened. Perhaps she hardly knew why she went to Him, unless it was because she felt that He was the best person to go to in any trouble or difficulty, and that He would know better than any one else what to do. Perhaps she may have hoped that He would work some miracle; for though He had never worked a miracle before, she felt He had the power to do so whenever He willed; for was He not God's Son, and were not the holy angels, that had crowded around His cradle, His messengers?

Jesus, however, gently puts her on one side. He tells her—not angrily or impatiently, but quite simply and kindly—that she must not come between Him and the work His Heavenly Father had given Him to do; and that the time for Him to declare His power had not yet come.

Mary knew that what her Son said was true ; that she had no longer any right even to suggest what He should do or refrain from doing ; and yet she felt sure somehow that He would yet find some way of helping ; and so, turning to the servants, who stood waiting to know what was to be done, she bids them do whatever Jesus should command them. Now in the courtyard there were standing six great water-pots of stone. They had been placed there that the guests might have water to wash their hands and feet before sitting down to supper.

The Jews wore sandals, and their feet needed constantly to be cleansed from the dirt and grime of the roadway ; and they were always most particular to wash their hands before eating.

Jesus spoke to the servants and told them to fill the water-pots with water. It seemed a strange command ; for though the jars were empty or nearly so, more water did not seem needed just then. But the servants were good servants and had learned to obey without asking questions ; and so they went to work with a will, and presently the great stone jars were brimming to the lip with fresh cool water.

And then Jesus ordered them to draw the water out into smaller vessels and carry some of it to the ruler of the feast, who was a guest of the bridegroom and sat at the head of the table. And again the servants did as they were bid, though they must have wondered still more at so strange an order. But what must their wonder have been like, when they found that what they poured into the ruler's cup was no longer water, but sparkling wine ?

The miracle that Mary had hoped for had come to pass. What God does slowly every year in vines, turning



THE MARRIAGE AT CANA

the silver rain from Heaven into the juice of the grape by slow degrees, Jesus had done in a moment of time, only without the use of any means to bring about the change.

And so there was no lack of wine after all; and the new wine, as we might have expected, was better and more delicious than the old; for when the ruler of the feast had tasted it, he called the bridegroom and told him he had done very differently from most givers of a feast—instead of offering his guests the best wine first and the cheaper kind afterwards, he had kept the good wine until last.

The miracle of Cana was the beginning of Jesus' miracles, and by working it He 'manifested forth His glory,' as St. John tells us, that is to say, He showed it openly to the world. The glory of Jesus was the glory which belonged to Him as the Son of God. It had always been His, but when He came on earth, He willed that it should be hidden for awhile. Now His own hand drew the veil aside, and it began to shine forth, just as the bright light of a lamp streams out into the darkness when the casement shutters are unbarred; or as some lovely jewel flashes forth its light when you touch a spring and the lid of the casket, in which it is concealed, flies open. The brightness and the glory in both cases have been there all the while. It only needed a hand to set them free.

There had been other miracles worked in olden days, quite as wonderful as this at Cana. Moses had changed water into blood to punish Pharaoh King of Egypt. In Zareptah, too, a city of Zidon, by the hand of Elijah, a poor widow woman's barrel of meal was kept from wasting, and her cruse of oil never failed all through three long years of famine.

But there was no glory manifested in cases like these,

beyond the glory of God. And the reason is this, that the power to work miracles in the case of such men as Moses and Elijah was a borrowed one. The wonderful works that were done of old were done in answer to prayer. It was not the prophet who worked the wonder, it was God who worked it through him.

Jesus, on the other hand, did His wonderful works by His own power. He was God as well as man, and as God He was not only all-loving, but all-powerful too. And so we find Him here at Cana able to bend the powers of nature to His will, to give happiness to a wedding-party, just as afterwards we shall see He was able to conquer all manner of diseases, to raise the dead to life, and even to forgive sins, which no one else can do but God.

There is one thing which I should like you to remember about the miracles of Jesus, and it is this; that each one was a kind of acted parable; by which I mean that it is meant to carry our thoughts beyond the actual work of blessing and healing men's bodies, to His other and higher work of blessing and healing their lives and souls.

This miracle of the changing of water into wine, for instance, what is it but a kind of parable of how Jesus is forever changing the common things of life into things rare and costly and beautiful?

If those words once spoken of a great writer and poet were true, that he touched nothing without adorning it, how much more true they are of Him, the Greatest of all poets. All that He touched He changed, and always for the better. He touched our poor fallen human nature when He became man, and raised and ennobled it. He touched common work and made it honourable. He touched the hard, rough Cross and it became the 'Tree of Life.

There were those poor, rough, common fishermen

disciples of His; He called them to His side and made them apostles and pillars of His Church. Weak men and women, and even little children, were turned by His power into the noble army of martyrs; the prodigal and the sinner brought Him the wasted muddy water of their misspent lives, and He changed it into the good wine of new and heavenly service.

And so it is still to-day. The mother puts her little baby into Jesus' loving arms at baptism, and He blesses it and gives it back a member of God's great Christian family, the Church, and His own dear child. He takes our sorrows and turns them into joys. He makes the trivial round, the common task, 'a road to bring us daily nearer God.' The cross, if bravely borne, He promises in the end to change into the crown; our poor worn-out bodies into the likeness of His own glorious body.

Let us take then this thought away from the story of Christ's first miracle. I may have only common things to offer to Jesus; my power of serving Him may be small; my life may seem a worthless, sin-stained thing. But if I bring Him what I have, if I give Him my heart, I can trust Him to turn the common gift into something nobler and better in the end.

"Oh that I were a cup, a golden cup,
Meet for the Master's use!"

.

So spoke a poor, vile, earthly thing,
A worthless castaway,
The Master heard—and when He passed that way,
He stopped and touched it with His wounded hand,
When lo! its baseness vanished, and instead
There stood a golden chalice, wondrous fair,
And overflowing with deep love for Him.
He raised it to His gracious lips, and quaffed
"The wine that maketh glad the heart of God";
Then took the cup to Heaven.'

IV

JESUS' HOME AT CAPERNAUM—THE FIRST CLEANSING OF
THE TEMPLE—THE RULER WHO CAME TO JESUS BY
NIGHT—THE WOMAN AT THE WELL OF SYCHAR

JESUS did not go back to Nazareth after leaving Cana, as we might perhaps have expected. We only read of His once revisiting His old home in after days, and then the people were offended at His teaching and tried to kill Him, and he left it never to return.

The place He now chose as His dwelling-place was a little town on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, called Capernaum.

It lay in the district known as Gennesareth, or the 'Garden Land'; a beautiful strip of country which bordered on the seashore and which was the garden of Galilee, just as Galilee was the garden of Palestine. Nowhere did the grass grow greener or the cornfields blossom into brighter gold than in Gennesareth. From a background of blue hills, the meadows sloped down to the water's edge, and were all ablaze in spring-time with the lily and the rose, the wild hyacinth and yellow crocus, and many other lovely flowers. In the thickets and by the roadsides the palm and date-tree lifted their feathery crowns; the orchards of Gennesareth were bright with the flowers of fruit of the orange and pomegranate; its figs and grapes were considered to be the finest in the land.

Capernaum was a very busy, prosperous little town, and so was better suited to be the scene of Jesus' ministry than quiet, sheltered Nazareth would have been. The great Roman road, which ran from the 'Great Sea' to Damascus, passed through it, and Jesus standing by the roadside must often have seen 'the slow caravans trailing by with the mystery of strange far-off places clinging to them—such as sea-beaten ships have for us, as they come gliding up the harbour.' Its streets, unlike those of Nazareth, were gay with shops. It had a market-place, to which the country people used to flock on market-days with their baskets of fruit and vegetables, and where all kinds of provisions were sold—barley, meal, and wheat, bunches of raisins, cakes of figs, jars of olive oil and honey, grape-juice syrup, and many other things for which Gennesareth was famous.

Being close to the sea, a great trade in fish was carried on at Capernaum. Its houses ran down to the beach, and there were many creeks along the shore which gave good anchorage to the fishing-boats. So every morning the fishing-fleet would put in at the landing-stage, and the fish in great silver heaps would be carried on shore to be dried and pickled, and packed in barrels to be sent to Jerusalem and elsewhere.

As it was only a small town, there were not many great houses at Capernaum. There was one beautiful building, however, of white marble. This was the synagogue, which had been built for the Jews by a Roman officer who was stationed there, and whose favourite slave Jesus afterwards healed. Capernaum had besides a custom-house where dues were collected on goods brought across the lake. It had its barracks, too, where a company of Roman soldiers lodged.

Such was the place that Jesus from this time forward

began to look upon as His second home, and which was to be the scene of so many of His wonderful miracles.

His first visit to Capernaum, however, was only a short one. It was the 'month of flowers,' and the pilgrims were preparing to go up to Jerusalem to keep the Passover, and so when the Capernaum caravan started for the south, Jesus went with it.

His first act after entering Jerusalem was one which startled the Jews very greatly. When describing the Temple, I told you how in the outer court—the Court of the Gentiles—stalls and pens had been set up for the oxen and sheep used for the sacrifices; and how the money-changers had begun to carry on their business there. To explain the presence of the money-changers, I ought to say that every Jew at Passover-time was expected to pay a silver coin into the treasury, called the 'half shekel,' a piece of money worth rather more than a shilling.

As there were Jews in Jerusalem from all parts of the world, there was always a good deal of foreign money passing from hand to hand, but such money was not allowed to be offered at the Temple because of the heathen symbols engraved upon it, and the heads of the false gods with which it was stamped. And so the money-changers used to hang about the Temple for the purpose of changing foreign coins for Jewish ones. They did this not out of good nature, but because it paid. They were a greedy, grasping crowd; their one thought was to get the better of their customers, and whenever they parted with a piece of money they took care to reap a handsome profit by the exchange. Filled as it was with a noisy crowd of buyers and sellers, the Court of the Gentiles at the Passover Festival must have resembled a market-place or Eastern bazaar.

THE CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE 105

Instead of the silence and the reverent hush which might well have been expected in a place set apart for the worship of God, the ear was stunned with loud talk, the confused bleating of sheep and lowing of oxen, and the chink of gold and silver.

And it had all come about through the greed of the chief priests who had charge of the Temple. The merchants and money-changers paid them rent, and the Temple guardians allowed the Temple to be dishonoured because it helped to make them rich.

Jesus had seen this buying and selling going on when He had gone up to Jerusalem to keep His first Passover, and no doubt it had sorely grieved and distressed Him even then. Now He felt the time had come to put a stop to it.

We can fancy how His anger must have risen, as, entering the Temple, He stood and gazed on the scene before Him; the noisy crowd bargaining and quarrelling; the sheep struggling in their pens, the oxen tugging at the ropes that bound them to the marble pillars; the cages full of doves littering the pavement; worst sight of all, the money-changers with their greedy, crafty faces, jingling their coins and inviting the passers-by to patronise their stalls. There were some pieces of rope lying on the ground before Him. He bent down and twisted them into a scourge, and with eyes blazing with anger began to drive out the sheep and the oxen, and all the evil crowd loitering in attendance upon them. Then, with one sweep of His arm, He overthrew the tables of the money-changers, so that all their little piles of gold and silver so carefully arranged were scattered far and wide over the filthy pavements. He did not touch the cages of the doves for fear of hurting the innocent creatures, but turning to the dove-sellers He bade them depart, in stern, indignant

tones. 'Take these things hence,' He said. 'Make not My Father's House a house of merchandise.'

It was all done in a moment. Nobody resisted; nobody cried 'stop.'

There was such a lofty, commanding look in Jesus' eyes; there was something so noble and fearless in His bearing, that the hearts of the wrongdoers were filled with fear. They might have made a stand, for they were many, and He was only one; but they dared not do it. They knew quite well that Jesus was right in what He had done, and that they were in the wrong. And so, just as wild beasts shrink back before the uplifted arm of their tamer, they slunk away before Jesus; while the people who stood by wondered and were amazed.

The only persons who plucked up courage to question Jesus as to what He had done in the Temple, were the priests. Even they did not venture to accuse Him of acting wrongfully, although in their hearts they must have been enraged at His having put them in the wrong, by condemning what they had allowed.

'What right,' they asked, 'have you to act in this way? You may say you are doing God's work. Well, show us some sign or miracle that you have been sent by God.' And Jesus answers in these strange words: 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.'

The Jews thought He was speaking of the Temple in which He was standing; God's beautiful house of shining gold and marble that King Herod had begun to rebuild and beautify forty-eight years before, and which was not finished yet. Was He a madman? What could He mean, this unknown Stranger from Galilee, by saying that He was able to build up again in three days, a temple which it had taken thousands of skilled workmen nearly fifty years of toil to raise?

But Jesus was not speaking of Herod's temple. The Jews had asked for a sign in a scornful, contemptuous way in order to put Him in the wrong; and so, in granting their request and giving them a sign, He gives them one which they would not understand. It was of a Temple not made with hands of which He was speaking, even the Temple of His sacred body. Their wicked hands should nail that body to the Cross, and it should be destroyed by death; but on the third day he should overcome death and His body should be raised again in glory. That was a sign which should show men who He really was, and declare His right to act in whatever way He pleased.

While at Jerusalem Jesus worked many miracles, so that the people began to gather round Him and to hail Him as the Christ. But Jesus knew that their hearts were not really ready to receive Him. He knew they were looking for an earthly prince; one who should lead them forth to battle against the Roman oppressor, and restore the lost glory of the land. He had not come to do that; His work was of quite a different kind, and so He did not encourage them to follow Him, for He knew they would only be disappointed in the end. There was one, however, whom He gladly welcomed to His side. His name was Nicodemus, and strangely enough he was a Pharisee. I say, strangely enough, for the Pharisees, as a body, from first to last were very unfriendly to Christ, and some of the strongest words in the Bible are uttered against them.

To St. John the Baptist they were a 'brood of vipers,' and Jesus Himself speaks of them as 'hypocrites,' 'blind guides,' and 'whited sepulchres.'

The curious thing about them was this. To all outward appearance they were particularly good and holy men. They set great store by their religion. They were

very particular about keeping the Law of Moses, and their phylacteries, or prayer-boxes, were larger, their prayers longer, and their fasts more severe than those of the other Jews. But what spoilt everything was the fact that, with all their parade of piety, they were not really sincere. Their religion was too often a cloak for a selfish, wicked life. Their long prayers and fasting and broad fringes to their garments were all meant to reflect glory upon themselves. They were, as Jesus once told them, like a cup polished and bright on the outside, but inside full of filth and uncleanness.

And yet even among the Pharisees there were some earnest souls who were not satisfied with outside shows and shams, and who sought after better things. Such an one Nicodemus seems to have been. He had grown dissatisfied with the form of the religion in which he had been brought up, and longed for a clearer vision of God. Since he had listened to Christ's words and seen His wonderful miracles, the knowledge had come to him that here was some one who could teach him a better way, some one whom God had sent to help poor souls in darkness that were struggling towards the light—

‘ Like plants in mines that never saw the sun,
But dream of him and guess where he may be,
And do their best to climb and get to him.’

And so he made up his mind to go to Jesus for help and guidance.

He held a high position among the Jews. He was a ‘master in Israel,’ a member of the great council called the Sanhedrim that managed the affairs of the nation; and yet he had not the courage to go openly.

He was afraid of the ridicule of his friends; afraid perhaps of being taunted—he, the great Rabbi—with

being a disciple of the Carpenter of Nazareth; afraid of losing his position and influence. And so he waited until night came, and, wrapping himself in his cloak, stole away in secret, to seek an interview with the 'teacher come from God.'

Jesus, we may be sure, would have preferred him to come as a brave man should have come, openly and by day. But He was never One to expect too much of His disciples at once; He always encouraged their weak beginnings in the hope of a better ending afterwards. And so He received Nicodemus kindly, and showed him the better way he had come to seek, and explained to him how he might enter the Kingdom of Heaven God was about to set up.

Nicodemus had all his life been taught—and in turn had taught others—that the way to win God's favour was to *do* things; to be particular about his prayers; to be strict in his observance of the Sabbath; to perform all the outside duties of religion with great exactness. Jesus told him that something more was needed than this. It was not fasting that God wanted, it was change of heart; it was not long praying, it was the heavenly mind.

These things were the gift of God's Holy Spirit, and Nicodemus would have to seek that gift and seek it in God's way. He would have to begin at the very beginning; he would have to bow his proud head and take the lowest place in God's school; he would have to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven through the gate of baptism, and be born again like a little child.

We can imagine how amazed Nicodemus must have been to hear all this. But Jesus tells him not to be surprised. The new birth was very mysterious and could not be explained, but it was real. It was like the wind—at that very time perhaps moaning round the upper

chamber where they were sitting. No one could track the wind's path ; it came and went just as it pleased, and yet what power it had, and what a real thing it was. So with the work of God's Holy Spirit in the heart. No one could say how the Spirit came and how It went. Only one thing could be said, that It was real. It had power to give life and holiness, as Nicodemus himself should find one day.

And then, having spoken of the work of God's Holy Spirit, Jesus goes on to tell Nicodemus something of His own wonderful work ; how He had come into the world to save the world by His death. He reminds him of what happened when the children of Israel had been bitten by fiery serpents in the wilderness ; how Moses had made a great serpent of brass and put it upon a pole, and how whoever looked at the serpent, lived. The brazen serpent, like the golden ladder, was a type of Himself. Man had been bitten by the fiery serpent of sin, and was slowly dying ; but God had provided a way by which he might escape death. The time was coming when Jesus should be crucified, and then dying man should be saved by looking, with penitence and faith, to the Cross, just as the dying Israelite was saved by lifting his eyes to the serpent on the pole. ' For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.'

Nicodemus left Jesus' presence to think and ponder over His words. He never forgot them. He did not come over to Jesus' side at once, but he did so in the end. We find him standing up for his Master afterwards when He was attacked by the chief priests and Pharisees, and asking that He should not be condemned unheard. When Jesus died, he stood firm where other men had failed. He came boldly forward to confess Christ and to float

His colours, when it seemed as if there was nothing to be gained by doing it. And so his weak beginning had a good ending after all. Starting as a faint-hearted straggler at first, by the grace of God's Holy Spirit he became at last a good soldier of Jesus Christ, and fought manfully, we may believe, under Christ's banner unto his life's end.

When the Passover was over, Jesus with His disciples left Jerusalem and went alone, preaching and teaching in the country districts of Judæa. After a time, finding that the success He met with aroused the anger and jealousy of the Pharisees, and not wishing to be hindered, at the very beginning of His work, by their plots against Him, He made up His mind to go quietly back to Galilee.

There were three roads open to Him; one across the plain of Sharon, another along the valley of the river Jordan, and the third through Samaria. Of these three roads He chose the last, because, in His love and pity, He wanted to do good to the despised Samaritans whom everybody hated, and for whom nobody had a kindly word.

The history of these Samaritans was a very curious one.

After the ten tribes had been carried away captive, the King of Assyria sent a number of people from the Assyrian cities to colonise the land. The new settlers were heathen, but in course of time they forsook their idols, and learned the worship of the One True God from the few Israelites who had been left behind, and with whom they became mingled. When the Jews came back from Babylon, and set about rebuilding the Temple Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed, the Samaritans, as this new race came to be called, were anxious to help them.

The Jews, however, despising them because they had once been heathen, refused their help, and would not allow them to touch a stone of the building. This

offended and hurt the Samaritans very greatly, and from that time forward there was the bitterest enmity between the two people, and they took every opportunity of showing their hatred and illwill towards one another.

Shut out of the Temple, the Samaritans built a temple of their own on one of their mountains, called Gerizim, which they declared to be even more holy than the Temple at Jerusalem. This made the Jews more angry than ever. When they were strong enough they invaded Samaria and conquered it, and razed the temple to the ground. In Jesus' day there was still great bitterness between the two nations. The Jews insulted the Samaritans and called them heathen, and cursed them openly in their synagogues. The Samaritans in their turn annoyed the Jews in every possible way.

To let their countrymen in Babylon know the exact time when the Passover Feast began, the Jews used to build beacon-fires which flashed from hill to hill, till the news was carried from the Mount of Olives to the far-off banks of the river Euphrates. At such times the Samaritans would build fires on their own hills, only on wrong days, so as to lead the watchers astray. They would not allow pilgrims from Galilee, passing through Samaria to Jerusalem, to lodge in their villages. They would even at times attack and ill-treat them. But though the Jews might hate the very name of Samaria, Jesus had no bitter feeling in His heart towards its people. Samaritan and Jew alike, in His eyes, were children of the One All-Father, whose love and pity, like the blue circle of the sky, embraced all the world. Instead of avoiding Samaria, as so many of the Jews used to do, 'He must needs' go through it, St. John tells us. That is to say, He felt drawn to go because He knew there were sad and

hungry souls waiting for Him there, and He wanted to help them as He longed to help and succour all. Leaving Judæa early in the morning, He travelled through Samaria, until at noonday He reached a city of Samaria, called Sychar. It was the ancient Shechem of the Old Testament, and many pleasant and holy memories clustered around it. In the oak-forest of Moreh hard by, Abraham had pitched his tent and built an altar to the Most High God, who had appeared to him there in a vision. There, too, Jacob had tarried on his way home after his fourteen years' service with his uncle Laban; and there he had dug a deep well through the limestone rock, which still exists to this day. It was at Shechem that the body of Joseph, in its painted mummy case, was buried, after having been carried forty years through the wilderness. It was at Shechem, upon the green slopes of Mounts Ebal and Gerizim, that Joshua gathered the twelve tribes together, and the Levites recited the blessings and cursings of the law, to which the people responded with loud 'Amen.'

Wearied and thirsty after his long morning walk, Jesus was glad to make His way to where the city well lay. Like most Eastern wells, it was a fair, grassy spot shaded with trees, and had a little alcove or recess with a stone seat, where the tired traveller might take his rest for awhile and be thankful, ere he rose up to continue his journey. There He sat waiting patiently for some one whom He knew was coming. By and by the person He was expecting drew near. It was a woman. She had come to draw water from the well, and on her head she carried an earthen pitcher, and held a coil of rope in her hand. Jesus watched her let down her pitcher into the well, in silence, and then as she drew it up He said, 'Give Me to drink.'

Water in the East is always gladly given to the thirsty. It is God's good gift to the very poorest of His children, to be freely shared by all who need it; and this Stranger who asked for water, how travel-stained He was, and how tired He looked! And yet the woman hesitated. He was a Jew; she could tell that by the sound of His voice and the white and blue tassels on His cloak. 'How is it that Thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria?' is her wondering question. And Jesus in reply tells her that if she only knew who He was, and the gift it was in His power to bestow, she would have asked of Him, and He would have given her living water.

It was the living water of God's Holy Spirit He meant, the Water of Life drawn from the well of Heaven; only the woman did not understand this. She thought He was speaking of the living, running water of some earthly spring or well, such as that which sparkled in the water-jar at her feet; and it puzzled her to know how He could draw water with no pitcher or rope to help Him.

And then Jesus went on to explain. The earthly water of which she was thinking quenched the thirst for awhile, but people soon became thirsty again. Those who drank of the living water that He gave should never thirst any more; the water should be in their hearts like a well, always springing up, ever satisfying, giving Eternal Life.

On hearing this, the woman eagerly asked Jesus to give her some of this wonderful water, that she might never feel thirst again, or be obliged to come to the well any more. Jesus saw that she did not yet understand His meaning, and without trying to explain it further He spoke to her tenderly but plainly about the sinful

life she was leading, and showed her that He knew all its guilty secrets. He did this because He wanted her to see herself as she really was, and to repent; for He knew that to be sorry for one's sin is always the first step towards better things, and that it is only by the road of repentance that the well of the Water of Life can ever be reached. Surprised and ashamed, the woman said, 'Sir,' or 'My Lord, I perceive that Thou art a prophet.' And then the thought flashed across her mind, 'If this Stranger is indeed a great and mighty prophet, as His knowledge of my life seems to prove that He is, He will be able to settle the question which has so long caused strife between the Samaritans and the Jews.' And so she asked Him which was the right place to worship God, on Mount Gerizim or at Jerusalem.

Jesus answered that the hour was coming, when God should be worshipped neither at Gerizim nor at Jerusalem alone, but in His Holy Church throughout all the world. God is Spirit—that was the answer to her question about temples and sacred places. As Spirit His presence fills every place. It was not of so much importance where worship was offered to Him; the important question was, how was it offered; it was not the temple that mattered, it was the heart that worshipped within the temple.

The truths Jesus taught were so wonderful, so different from any truths she had ever been taught before, that the woman was amazed. She could not help thinking to herself that the Christ when He came would speak just such words as these. 'I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ,' she timidly said; 'when He is come, He will tell us all things.' Jesus answered, 'I that speak unto thee am He.'

Jesus' disciples had gone into the city to buy food while He was resting by the well, and now they came back,

and were much surprised at finding their Master talking to a woman. To talk to any woman in public was one of the six things which it was thought unseemly for a Rabbi or teacher to do; and here was Jesus not only talking to a woman, but to one who was a Samaritan as well. But He was their Master, and they had too much reverence for Him to ask Him the reason for what He did.

At their approach, the woman, with Christ's words, 'I that speak unto thee am He,' ringing in her ears, and making music in her heart, hurried off to the city to spread the joyful news. She did not remember to take her water-pot. She had caught a glimpse at last of the living water in God's well, and thirsted no more for the water of earth. 'Come, see a man,' are her eager words, 'which told me all things that ever I did. Is not this the Christ?'

It was with her, just as with the crowd afterwards, who cried when they saw Jesus do one wonderful work, 'He hath done all things well!' She felt that her whole life had been laid bare before Him; and that His steadfast loving look had read it all, as one reads the pages of a book.

Meanwhile the food the disciples had brought Jesus lay all untasted before Him, and when they anxiously press Him to take some of it, He tells them He has already eaten. His hunger and thirst had been quite forgotten. The Good Shepherd could only think of the poor lost sheep that He had put out His hand that day to save. To do God's will, that was His real food, to finish His work in saving the world His true meat and drink. Pointing to the cornfields which stretched all around them, and whose dark furrows the springing wheat was just beginning to colour with its tender green, Jesus begins to speak about the coming Harvest; only it is not the harvest of the corn, but the Harvest of human souls,

of which He is thinking. The earthly harvest was still four months off, the Heavenly Harvest was already ripe. He had been sowing the seed of Eternal Life that day in a woman's heart, and it had already sprung up and was bearing fruit. He had seed to sow in the hearts of the great crowd already beginning to stream towards Him from the city gates. That, too, should spring up and bear fruit just in the same way. The work He had begun to do, they, His disciples, must carry on afterwards. He had begun, they must finish; He had sown, they should reap; and doing the work of the faithful reaper, they should receive their reward. Theirs should be the joy which comes from saving souls; theirs should be the gathered sheaves themselves laid at the Master's feet, in the great day of Harvest, when the Sower and reaper should rejoice together. That was a joyful day for the little town of Sychar when Jesus entered its walls, and began to teach its people the way of life. No one had thought them worth helping before, but Jesus thought them worth it, and for two days He remained among them; two happy days, in which the sick were healed, the sorrowful comforted, and the weary and heavy-laden found rest. And some, we are told, believed on Him because of the story the woman told, but many more because of His own word. 'We have heard Him ourselves,' they said, 'and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.'

V

HOW JESUS HEALED THE NOBLEMAN'S SON—THE REJECTION AT NAZARETH—THE MIRACULOUS DRAUGHT OF FISHES

As Jesus entered Galilee from Samaria the people flocked around Him, eager to gaze upon His face and listen to His teaching. For He was no longer the unknown Carpenter of Nazareth. His fame had begun to spread; the wonderful works He had done at Jerusalem had gone before Him, and the people were proud to think that so great a prophet had arisen out of their own country.

It was to little Cana among the hills that He made His way at first. It was here, you remember, that Nathanael lived, and it was perhaps at his house, surrounded by its pleasant garden, that Jesus sought rest and shelter for awhile.

While at Cana Jesus worked another of His wonderful miracles of healing. There was living at Capernaum a great nobleman, a courtier, it is thought, of King Herod Antipas, ruler of Galilee. He was rich and had a fine house and many friends. He had a wife and children too, perhaps; at any rate we know he had one little boy whom he dearly loved. But one day trouble, which sooner or later enters into every home, knocks at his door. His little lad is taken ill of a raging fever. The doctors are called in, but though they do their best,

he rapidly grows worse. Presently the whisper goes round that there is no hope. No hope! Can we not imagine the father's grief when he hears these words? He is in despair. Suddenly, however, the news comes to his ears that Jesus, the great physician, whose name is on everybody's lips, has come back to Cana, where He had made the water wine. 'There then is still a chance for my boy,' the father thinks, and he makes up his mind to go to Cana to ask Jesus' help.

Capernaum was some twenty-five miles from Cana, and it was a rough and uphill journey that lay before the nobleman, but we do not mind rough journeys when the life of one we love is at stake. Starting early in the morning, he reaches Cana by the middle of the day, and, finding Jesus, entreats Him to come back with him to Capernaum without delay, and heal his dying child.

Perhaps there was the thought in his heart, 'If Jesus will only do this I will believe in Him with all my heart and become His disciple'; and it was perhaps in answer to this thought that Jesus sadly turns to him, and to the eager crowd that had begun to gather around, and tells them that nobody seems able to believe on Him without seeing some wonder or miracle performed by Him.

Could it be that He was going to refuse His help? At the bare idea the father's heart cries out in an agony, 'Lord, come down ere my child die.' And Jesus, moved with compassion at the sight of so much sorrow and distress, makes haste to answer his prayer. Only He answers it in a very unexpected way. He does not come down to Capernaum—there was no need for that. He works the miracle that is asked of Him in the place where He is.

With the light of a great pity shining in His eyes, He bids the poor anxious father take comfort. 'Go thy way,' He says; 'thy son liveth.'

And the nobleman believed His word. His faith in Jesus had already begun to grow. He felt sure—he hardly knew why—that Jesus was not deceiving him, and that His healing power had really reached his child, as he tossed on his sickbed so many miles away.

And so, instead of starting for his home at once, he remained at Cana until the next day. Then, as he descends the rocky mountain road that leads to Capernaum, he meets his servants hastening towards him with the glad news that his little son is alive and well. And when he asks them when the change had come, they tell him that the fever had suddenly disappeared at one o'clock the day before—exactly at the very time Jesus had spoken the words, 'Go thy way; thy son liveth.'

And now the father's faith in Jesus, which had already grown strong, becomes stronger still. It changes his whole life. From being a royal officer in the service of an earthly king, he becomes a soldier in the train of the King of kings.

More than this, he becomes a missionary for Jesus in his own home. He tells his little lad the story of the Compassionate Saviour, who was so sorry for him when He heard that he was ill, that He sent His angel to touch him and make him well and strong again; he tells it to his wife; he tells it to his servants. And the belief that Jesus is the Christ begins to grow in all their hearts, till they too become His disciples. And it was through the sickness of a little child that it had all been brought about! God had sent sorrow to the nobleman's house, and sorrow had led to Jesus. That is what sorrow so often does. It is God's angel, and He sends it to turn

men's hearts to Himself, when perhaps, but for its loving ministry, they would never turn.

'God never would send you the darkness
If He felt you could bear the light ;
But you would not cling to His guiding hand
If the way were always bright ;
And you would not care to walk by faith,
Could you always walk by sight.

' 'Tis true He has many an anguish
For your sorrowful heart to bear,
And many a cruel thorn-crown
For your tired head to wear ;
He knows how few would reach Heaven at all
If pain did not guide them there.'

And now Jesus went back once more to His old home at Nazareth. Much had happened since the day He left the little white town among the hills where He had been brought up. He had gone out a simple village carpenter, unnoticed and unknown ; He had come back a famous Rabbi and a mighty worker of miracles, one to be treated with all reverence and respect.

It was the Sabbath day soon after He arrived, and in the early morning He joined the throng of worshippers as they hastened along the well-worn, well-remembered path that led to the village synagogue.

Let us see what the Nazareth synagogue was like. It would stand perhaps in the main street—a little flat-roofed building made of stone, with perhaps a carving over the door representing a seven-branched candlestick, or a bunch of grapes, or the pot of manna, with Aaron's rod that budded. On the inside, a number of rows of pillars would divide it into aisles, the seats for the men being on the floor, and a gallery being provided for the women.

At the end, looking towards Jerusalem, would be a raised platform with a painted chest upon it known as

the Holy Ark. Here were kept the great parchment rolls, in their embroidered linen covers, containing the sacred Scriptures. There would be a curtain of coloured silk in front of the ark, with a lamp burning brightly before it. Near the ark, and facing the people, would be the 'front seats,' where the ruler of the synagogue sat with the elders and the more important of the people. Lower down would come a sort of reading-desk or pulpit, from which the lessons were read and the sermon preached.

The synagogue service used to begin with prayer, after which the Jewish creed was recited. Then came another prayer, followed by a number of thanksgivings to God, called 'benedictions'; and then with great ceremony the ark was uncovered, and first a lesson from the law and then one from the prophets, was read. Afterwards a sermon from the reader brought the service to a close.

It was the ruler of the synagogue's place to choose the reader and preacher, and he usually chose some learned Rabbi, or Pharisee, or other person of note. On this particular Sunday, Jesus was chosen, because He had become a person of consequence in the eyes of the people, and they were all anxious to hear Him preach.

He took the roll which was handed to Him, and, opening it at the 61st chapter of the Book of Isaiah, He read those beautiful verses in which the prophet describes the Christ whom God was going to send, and the wonderful work He should do. He then gave the roll back into the verger's hands and sat down.

Meanwhile the eyes of all in the synagogue were fastened on Him, and every one waited in breathless silence to hear what He was going to say. Then He began to speak, and His first words must have sent a thrill through every heart—'This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears.' What did the words mean?

Why, that the Christ had actually come! He was sitting there before them, and Jesus, whom they had all known from a little boy, was He. Was not that a wonderful thing? And yet that was the claim He was making. Listen! God, He was saying, had anointed Him with His Holy Spirit, to preach the Gospel to the poor; He had sent Him to heal the broken-hearted; to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those that were bruised, to preach the welcome time of the coming of the Lord.

So Jesus spoke, and as they listened to His words, the people wondered more and more. They had heard many sermons in the little synagogue, but never one like this. Jesus' voice had such a tender, loving ring, His words were so gracious and so wonderful, they felt as though they could never tire of listening to Him.

But when He had finished and they had begun to think over what He had said and to talk it over among themselves, doubts began to arise in their minds. After all, how unlikely it seemed that Jesus should really be the Christ. Why, they had known Him from the time when Mary used to carry Him about in her arms. They had seen Him as a little boy playing in the Nazareth streets, and gathering flowers in the fields. They had watched him grow up. They knew (as they thought) His whole history. Besides, was He not a carpenter by trade? He had not even been trained up as a scholar, or received a commission to teach. And the saying of an old writer would rise up in the minds of some of them:—

‘The wisdom of a learned man cometh by opportunity of leisure. How can he get wisdom who holdeth the plough and whose talk is of bullocks? So every carpenter and taskmaster who laboureth night and day; the smith also sitting by the anvil. So doth the potter

turning the wheel about with his feet. All trust in their hands, and every one is wise in his work. They shall not be sought for in public counsel, nor sit high in the congregation. They shall not be found where parables are spoken.'

Jesus read their thoughts. He understood the meaning of the murmurs that began to arise. They wanted Him to give them a sign, to work some miracle to prove that He had been really sent by God and was indeed the Christ. He had worked miracles in other places; well, let Him work a miracle here in His own city and they would believe on Him. But Jesus would not work a miracle. It was never His way to force people to believe on Him. Signs were for people who had faith, not for those who doubted and disbelieved.

He might have known, He tells them sadly, that they would not accept Him or His teaching, for a prophet is never highly thought of in his own country. Had He been a stranger, perhaps they would have listened to Him. And then He goes on to warn them of the danger they were in of losing the blessing God had sent Him to bring them. It did not follow that they had a claim on these blessings because they were Jews. God's blessings were only for those deserving of them. Israel's greatest prophets, Elijah and Elisha, had worked their most wonderful miracles for the benefit of strangers. There were many widows in Israel at the time of the great famine in Ahab's reign, but Elijah only helped a foreigner, a woman of Zidon; there were many lepers in the days of Elisha's ministry, but he healed none save Naaman, the captain of the host of Syria.

As Jesus spoke these words, a great wave of anger swept over the crowded synagogue. What, should the despised and hated Gentiles be indeed preferred before

them—was that His meaning? Were they, the children of Abraham and the chosen people of God, in danger of being elbowed out of God's favour by the heathen? In a moment the whole place is in an uproar. A rush is made towards the platform where Jesus sits. He is seized, borne out of the synagogue, and hurried away to the brow of the hill upon which the city stands, a great white cliff—they show it to you to-day—from which they try in their fury to cast Him down to destroy Him.

But the hour for Jesus' death had not yet come. No one had power to take away His life, until He willed to lay it down of Himself, and so the people of Nazareth could not hurt Him. 'Passing through the midst of them,' says St. Luke, 'He went His way.'

It may be that He made Himself invisible, and so escaped the vengeance of these angry, violent men. It may be that He awed them by turning the same look of kingly majesty upon them that He afterwards turned upon the armed men in the Garden of Gethsemane, when 'they went backward, and fell to the ground.' In any case He was never in any real danger of His life. He was safe as Daniel was safe in the den of lions, or the three children in the burning, fiery furnace. Angel forms ringed Him round—angel hands shielded Him from harm.

Sadly and in sorrow must Jesus have turned away from Nazareth. He loved the little flower city among the hills; its fields, its woods, its little narrow streets, its people all alike were dear to Him. Nearly His whole life had been spent there; and when the time had come for Him to declare Himself openly to the world, He had chosen Nazareth out of all the towns in Galilee as the place to declare Himself. And Nazareth had turned against Him. His old friends had tried to kill Him.

How the thought must have hurt. We feel the wounds

dealt by a friend, more than those given by an enemy. So Jesus would feel His rejection at Nazareth all the more keenly, because it was 'His own city where He had been brought up.'

And so, driven away from Nazareth, He went back again to Capernaum. There He began to gather a little band of disciples around Him, to help Him in carrying out the great work He had come to do, of setting up God's kingdom on earth, and teaching men the way of holiness and peace. The four disciples He first called, were the four who had already been chosen by Him; but the time had not yet arrived for them to leave all and follow Him, and they had gone back again to their work. Now they were to leave their work and take up the higher, grander service, never to lay it down again till death.

It was at the seaside that the call came and their choice was made. The Sea of Galilee was more of a lake perhaps than a sea. It was about twelve miles long and six miles broad, and lay in a deep hollow surrounded by a circle of hills, 'like an opal set in emeralds.' But, though small, it was one of the loveliest of inland lakes. The Jews used to say that God had spread the waters of seven seas in their land, but that the Sea of Galilee was dear to Him above all the rest. Its waters were full of fish; many kinds of beautiful wild birds darted over its surface, and its shores were embosomed in trees, and bright with the red and white blossoms of the oleander.

In Jesus' day, too, the lake was crowded with all kinds of shipping. The Roman war-vessel, its decks aglitter with rows of men in armour, ploughed its waves; the great galleys of Herod spread their purple sails before the breeze that blew across it from the mountains; at night its waters twinkled with the light of innumerable fishing-boats, as the sky twinkles with its stars.



THE CALL OF THE FISHERMEN

Overlooking the sea were other cities besides Capernaum. There was Chorazin, the 'woody place'; Bethsaida, the 'house of fishing'; Tiberias, the pleasure city of King Herod, with its splendid marble palace and race-course; and Gadara, where Jesus afterwards healed one possessed with a devil. All these towns, once so prosperous, have now disappeared. The grass waves over the once busy streets of Capernaum, where Jesus so often walked. Few, if any, of the familiar sights upon which He looked are to be seen to-day. Only the blue sky and the hills and the changing sea—His sea—remains.

'Clear silver water in a cup of gold,
Under the sunlit steepes of Gadara,
It shines—His lake—the Sea of Chinnereth;
The waves He loved, the waves that kissed His feet,
So many blessed days. O happy waves!
O little, silver, happy sea, far famed,
Under the sunlit steepes of Gadara.'

Jesus was walking by 'silver Galilee' when He caught sight of His old friends, Simon and Andrew, and at a little distance from them, James and John. They had come in from their fishing, and their boats, with their brown sails furled, lay anchored close to the shore.

It had been a wild, stormy night, and as they had passed to and fro upon the waves, they had cast their nets and cast them again, but had not caught a single fish. Now they were busy on the beach, washing the sand and sea-weed out of their nets and mending the broken meshes.

Seeing Simon and Andrew, Jesus made His way towards them. He was being followed by an eager crowd, who pressed upon Him to hear His wonderful words; for now that His fame had begun to spread abroad, many were anxious to see and hear Him and ask His help.

Entering one of the boats which belonged to Simon, Jesus asked him to push out a little from the land, that He might be able the better to speak to the people. Then sitting down, He taught them from the boat, His voice travelling along the water, and bringing to the weary multitude the message of comfort and of hope for which they longed.

And now, the sermon to the people ended, Jesus prepares to teach a lesson to His disciples; a lesson about the work which lay before them, and the new life to which they were now to be called. Turning to Simon Peter, He bids him hoist anchor and make for the open sea, for there is fishing to be done. What a strange command it must have seemed! Night was the proper time for casting the net, and the night had gone and the sun had long been up; besides, the fishermen had already cast the net, and cast it all in vain. The deep and shaded caves where the fish were wont to gather had been thoroughly searched by them, and not a fish had been snared; how unlikely they should fare better now.

‘Master,’ says Simon Peter sadly, ‘we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing—toiled till we were weary and exhausted,’ so the Greek word he uses means; ‘and yet . . . at Thy word I will let down the net.’ What good the letting down of the net would do he did not know; but he had faith in Jesus. He knew there must be some good reason for the command the Master had given, and that, if he had patience, he should know what that reason was.

He did not have long to wait. No sooner is the net let down into the clear water than it encloses a shoal of fish so great, that the meshes of the net are hardly strong enough to bear the weight thrown upon them. Finding the net giving way, the fishermen make signals to James and John, their partners; and presently their boat comes

flying across the water. Soon, with the aid of the strong arms of the fishermen and the hired servants, the catch is lifted into the boats. Higher and higher grows the shining pile of fish between the decks, until the boats are so full that they begin to dip deep down into the water.

And then Simon Peter does a strange, unexpected thing. So full of wonder was he at what had happened, that his heart seemed almost too full for words. Flinging himself at Jesus' feet, in husky, broken tones he cries, 'Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.' He felt that Jesus, whose eye had so easily pierced the crystal depth of the sea, could read every secret of his poor, shallow, muddy heart, and he felt unworthy to be near Him. Jesus was so great, so wonderful, and so good; and he was so sinful, so weak, and so faithless. Ah! but there was repentance in poor Peter's heart as well as sin and weakness; there was longing for better things; there was desire to be on the side of God. And Jesus, whose 'kind but searching glance' had indeed read Peter's heart, saw the sorrow and the longing, and did not take him at his word. Instead, we seem to see Him stretching out His loving hand to raise Peter up and draw him still closer to His side.

'Fear not,' He says, 'from henceforth thou shalt catch men.'

It was as though He said, 'You shall be *My* fisherman henceforth, O Peter. I will send you forth to cast your net upon the wide waters of the world, and you shall draw men's hearts up to God, as the fisher draws his fish up from the depths of the sea.'

Yes, that was to be St. Peter's work henceforth—that was to be the work of all Christ's fishermen disciples. They were to leave their fishing to 'take men alive';

they were to help to win the world for Jesus. And so, we read, when they reached land, they forsook all, and followed Him.

How often in after years the memory of that morning spent upon the waters would come back to the disciples; and what a message of comfort and of hope it would bring them as they went about their work.

The sad feeling, that sooner or later comes to all who work for God, would no doubt often come to them. It would seem at times as if their labour had been all in vain. 'We have toiled all the night'—cannot we fancy we hear the sorrowful words again repeated?—'and have taken nothing. There is nothing to show for our work; the world seems as far from accepting Christ as ever.'

And then the vision of Jesus, as He stood that day in Simon's fishing-boat, would start up before their eyes. They would remember how He had filled their nets at a time when things looked at their very worst, and they would take courage. After all they had nothing to do with results. Their work was just to go on letting down the net. They must preach, and teach, and baptize, and leave the rest to Him. And so they did; and we know in the end how wonderfully God filled their nets, and what a great Harvest of the world's sea they gathered in for Christ.

Dear child, the lesson that Jesus taught His disciples by the miraculous draught of fishes is one for us to lay to heart as well. We have all got work to do for God, and we must never lose courage if it seems to fail or come to nothing. The great thing is to learn the lesson of simple obedience; to go on doing whatever God gives us to do faithfully and well. He will take care that no work is ever wasted that is done for love of Him. 'The world,' it has been said, 'crowns success—God crowns faithfulness.'

VI

MIRACLES OF HEALING AT CAPERNAUM—THE CLEANSING OF THE LEPER

FOLLOWED by His four disciples, Jesus now took up His abode at Capernaum. We get a good idea from the Bible story of the kind of life He lived in the little city by the silver sea. It was a life given up to works of mercy and loving-kindness. As we read of all the kind and wonderful things He did, we can well understand how glad and thankful the people of Capernaum must have been to welcome so great a teacher and healer as their guest.

It was the Sabbath day, and Jesus had gone in the early morning, as His custom was, to attend the service at the synagogue. There would not be many empty seats in the great white marble building when it was known that Jesus was going to preach. When He mounted the preacher's platform and sat down to speak to the people, a great hush would fall upon the congregation and they would listen eagerly to the message that fell from His lips.

Jesus' sermons were so different from the long, dry, tiresome discourses of the Rabbis and the Scribes to which the people were accustomed, that it was no wonder they heard Him gladly. The Scribes and Pharisees simply echoed the words of teachers who were dead and gone—they had no message of their own to give. Jesus' message was a living and powerful one; He spoke as one

who had authority, and His words were like the words of a king. Then again the Scribes and Pharisees were hard and proud and unloving, and He was always kind and compassionate. People felt He understood their troubles and difficulties and was sorry for them; they felt He knew how hard they found the battle against temptation and sin, and wanted to help them fight it; and as they listened their cares and sorrows seemed to be lifted away.

On this particular Sunday, when Jesus was preaching and the people were eagerly drinking in His words, suddenly the whole synagogue was startled by the loud scream of a man possessed with a devil.

There were many of these poor people wandering about in Jesus' day, and they were the most pitiable and miserable beings we can well imagine. The man possessed with a devil was really in worse bondage than a madman. He had no rest or peace. As the wind hunts the withered leaf, so the evil spirit harassed and drove and tormented him by day and night; and there was no door of escape. One of the saddest things about his sad, unhappy case was that he knew perfectly well the misery of his lot. He was as a man torn in twain—he might see the right and the good and long to follow it, and yet, at the same time, he might be led against his will into all kinds of sin and uncleanness.

‘Just like one who in his dream finds himself engaged in some dreadful deed from which his whole soul starts back in horror, but which he must do to the end,’ so it was with the poor devil-haunted man. He was driven to do the devil's work against his will. Struggle as he might, he was powerless to break the cruel chain that bound him. I have said it was the voice of the possessed of the devil which rang through the synagogue,

but it was really the evil spirit that spoke through the man's lips. It knew well enough who Jesus was and what He had come to do, and it shrank from His all-holy presence just as evil crawling things that love darkness shrink away before the light.

'Let us alone; what have we to do with Thee, Thou Jesus of Nazareth? art Thou come to destroy us? I know Thee who Thou art, the Holy One of God.' So the awful voice cries out. And Jesus rises in majesty, His eyes shining like lamps of fire, and rebukes the foul spirit. 'Be silent, and come out of him,' He says. And at His words the man falls down writhing upon the ground, while the evil spirit leaves him, in obedience to Jesus' word; so that the people are amazed. 'What a word is this!' they say; 'for with authority commandeth He even the unclean spirits, and they do obey Him.'

Leaving the synagogue, Jesus next went out to Simon Peter's house. The home of St. Peter was really at Bethsaida, but he seems to have moved to Capernaum—which was only a little way off—in order to be near his Master.

St. Peter had his wife's mother living with him, and at the time of Jesus' visit she lay sick of a 'great fever.' There were several flat, marshy plains about the Sea of Galilee, and Capernaum was near one of them. Marshes breed fever, and the fever from which Peter's wife's mother was suffering was the scourge of the countryside.

No sooner had Jesus crossed the threshold than they tell Him of the dark shadow that has fallen upon the house, and He at once makes His way to where the sick woman lies, tossing and moaning upon her pallet. He does not drive away the fever by a word, as He had done before in the case of the nobleman's little lad. He goes up to her bedside, and takes her by the hand, and lifts her

up. (It is St. Mark who tells us this, and his Gospel has been called 'the Gospel of the Hand,' because he so often speaks of the outstretched, loving hand of Jesus.) And lo! at His touch the fever leaves the sufferer, and she is made perfectly well and strong again. So completely indeed is her health restored that, rising from her bed, she goes quietly about the house as if nothing had happened, and is able to show her gratitude to Jesus by acts of loving ministry.

And so the morning and afternoon pass away and by and by evening draws on. Hitherto there had been but few people to be seen in the streets. It was the day of rest, and people might not walk more than a short distance from their houses, nor carry any burdens out of doors until dusk fell. Then, when three stars could be counted in the sky, a silver trumpet was blown, and the holy day was over.

The people of Capernaum had been anxiously awaiting this moment, and as soon as the sun's rim dipped behind the hills and the faint silver of the stars began to show, they came streaming out of nearly every house, bringing their sick to lay them at Jesus' feet.

It must have been a strange, pathetic sight—that great multitude of sick people gathered together before St. Peter's door.

Among the crowd might be noticed some rough fisherman tenderly carrying in his arms his little crippled boy. He has come in the hope that Jesus will straighten out the twisted limbs of his little lad and make him strong and well, and able to play and run about like other children. Or you might see the anxious mother, straining to her breast her sick child, whose bright eyes and flushed cheek tell of the fever fire that is slowly burning the little life away. There, with slow and painful

step, would come the lame man, helped along by kindly hands. There, borne high through the press upon a litter, some poor paralytic unable to stir hand or foot, an even heavier burden to himself than to his friends. The blind beggar and the deaf mute, the halt and the maimed, the sick and the dying, all who were in pain and had need of healing, were gathered there to await the coming of the Good Physician and taste the medicine of His loving, healing touch. Presently the door opens and Jesus comes out. He looks upon the scene of suffering spread before Him, and His eye softens and His face becomes very pitiful. Stepping out into the crowded street, He passes along the narrow lane they make for Him to go by; and as He goes He lays His hand first on one and then on another, and always with a bright look and kindly, loving word for each. He touches the sick child and the dying woman, the cripple with his bent back, and the sick of the palsy with his shaking, trembling limbs. And at his touch dim eyes grow bright, the colour steals back to faded hollow cheeks, the pain and the weakness all disappear.

‘The blind beheld His face
Who is more fair than all the sons of men
The lame man leaped in praise; the leper’s voice
Forgot in happy song his old sad cry.
The sick man’s moan of weariness or pain
Was heard no more. This father for a son
At point to die, that for a daughter dead—
Weeping and praying—heard one word of power
And ceased to weep, or wept again for joy.’

There must have been many happy homes that night in little seaside Capernaum. Yesterday they had been—many of them—plunged in darkest gloom, but Jesus of Nazareth had passed by and the dark shadow of suffering and of pain had been lifted away. Hearts once sad

were filled with gladness now. God had 'sent His word and healed them,' and 'they were saved from their destruction.'

Rest is sweet to the weary, and Jesus must sadly have needed rest, for His had been a crowded, busy day. But though He retired to rest He did not sleep the hours of the night away as did the others. Long before the streets of Capernaum were again astir, while the stars were still lighting the Heaven with their soft fire, He arose and wandered away by Himself in the direction of the quiet hills that lay behind the town. Climbing to the top of one of these He knelt long upon His knees in earnest prayer. Had Nathanael been with Him then he might perhaps have seen the sight that Jesus had promised he should see one day—the heavens opened, and the white-robed messengers of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man. But no human eye rested upon Jesus as He knelt. He was quite alone but for the angels.

Jesus' greatest joy, we know, lay in thus going apart to be alone with God. It was in communion with His Heavenly Father that He found strength to follow the path of pain and self-sacrifice He had set Himself to tread. After prayer the heavy burden of His life-work seemed to lighten, and He would go back with new courage to face the difficulties and disappointments that awaited Him in the world.

And now the morning broke upon the hills, and Jesus saw St. Peter and the other disciples climbing the green slope upon whose summit He was standing. Early as it was, the people of Capernaum had already begun to enquire for Jesus and to try to find Him, and St. Peter had come to tell Him this. 'Master,' he says proudly, 'all men seek for Thee.' He was so pleased and happy

to think that the whole town was at Jesus' feet; he wanted his Master to come back and enjoy His triumph. But Jesus did not intend to return to Capernaum just then. God had sent Him, He tells His disciples, not to bless and help the people of Capernaum alone, but those of the other towns and villages as well. And so, instead of going back to the town, He began a journey through Galilee, going from place to place preaching the glad tidings of the Kingdom, healing the sick, and casting out devils.

Only one of Jesus' miracles in this journey of His is described in the Gospels. This is the miracle of the cleansing of a leper.

Leprosy was a very common disease among the Jews, and a very awful one. It has been described as a living death, and the leper himself as a walking sepulchre. It began in the form of tiny spots upon the skin, which gradually spread until the whole body became an awful silvery white, and by slow degrees perished and fell to pieces. It was a disease sent, it was thought, straight from God, and so it went by the name of 'the stroke.' There was no cure for it; only God who sent it could take it away. It was looked upon too as a type of sin, and accordingly the leper was avoided and shunned as one under the ban of God's displeasure. He was obliged to say good-bye to all his friends; to leave his wife and children and his home, and to wander day after day, like some wild and savage animal, in the fields and woods and desert places. He might not drink from any running stream; he might not rest his fevered, aching limbs by the desert well, or enter any house in search for food. Should any one speak to him, he must not return an answer; should any one approach, he must warn him off by raising the leper's cry, 'Unclean, unclean!'

Clothed in sackcloth, and with a covering on his lips, 'as one that mourneth for his mother,' the leper dragged out his solitary, dreadful existence. By degrees his leprosy grew until it poisoned the very springs of life; and then death mercifully put an end to his sufferings.

It was a man 'full of leprosy,' St. Luke, the physician, tells us, that met Jesus as He was passing through Galilee; that is to say, a leper with the disease in its worst and most terrible form. The fame of Jesus' wonderful cures had spread far and wide among the towns and villages of Galilee, and the poor, suffering, half-dying man seems to have thought that if he could but drag himself into Jesus' presence, the great Healer might have mercy upon him and recover him of his leprosy. Had not God's prophets of old been granted the power of healing the leper, and would not the Christ, if this indeed were He, be able to do much more than they?

And so he draws near to Jesus as he sees Him approaching. He hardly dares to come near because he knows he has no right to come, and yet he feels it is his only chance, and he must seize it or be lost. The people shrink back at his approach with horror and dismay, but he gives no heed to them. Kneeling at Jesus' feet with a dreadful, appealing look in his eyes, he cries in broken tones, 'Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean.' And Jesus looks at him, and seeing the awful ravages the leprosy has caused, and the agony of the sufferer, He is filled with pity. He sometimes kept people waiting before He spoke the word of cure for which they longed, but we never read of His keeping a leper waiting. Swiftly come the words: 'I will: be thou clean'; and as He speaks He puts forth His hand and touches the leper.

‘And lo! the scales fell from him, and his blood
 Coursed with delicious coolness through his veins;
 And his dry palms grew moist, and on his brow
 The dewy softness of an infant’s stole.
 His leprosy was cleansed, and he fell down
 Prostrate at Jesus’ feet and worshipped Him.’

How surprised the disciples and those who stood around must have been to see Jesus lay His hand upon the leper! To touch one suffering from leprosy meant defilement, so the Law of Moses taught; it was as bad as touching a dead body. Why, they must have wondered, did the Master run this risk? Ah, they had yet to learn that defilement could never touch Jesus. ‘The current flowed the other way.’ His touch brought cleansing to every stained and evil thing He touched, but nothing could hurt or defile Him in return. Just as the sunlight touches to gold the muddy waters of some roadside pool and yet takes no taint, so it was with Him. All through His life He was touching stained and evil things, yet got no hurt by touching them. He could eat and drink with publicans and sinners and be none the worse for it. He could reach down His hand to the very depths to lift the sinner out of the mire and clay of his sins, and draw it up again as white as snow. For He was the source of holiness. Power to cleanse and heal was ever streaming out from Him like a fountain; defilement and uncleanness had no power to stain or enter in.

Jesus laid a command upon the leper as He sent him away, cured and rejoicing. He told him not to spread abroad the story of his cure, but to make his way quietly to Jerusalem and get a certificate of his cleansing from the Temple priests, and offer the sacrifices the law prescribed in the case of a man healed of his leprosy by the power of God.

Oh, how blue the arch of the sky above his head must have seemed to the healed man as he went his way; how beautiful the flowers that fringed the roadway along which he passed; how lovely the song of the birds among the branches! How his heart must have leaped for joy at the thought of the friends and loved ones to whom he was now given back, and the welcome home that awaited him on his return! So happy was he that he seems to have forgotten Jesus' command to keep the story of his cure a secret, but told it everywhere. And as he told it the news spread, until Jesus was no longer able to enter into the towns and cities because of the eager, excited crowds which began to press around Him in the hope of seeing some wonder worked by Him. And so He withdrew to the wilderness for awhile, and there, in the quiet of the desert, unvexed by the bustle and noise of a restless world, He sought for rest and strengthening power in prayer.

VII

HOW A PARALYSED MAN CAME THROUGH THE ROOF—
THE CALL OF LEVI THE PUBLICAN—HOW THE KING
CHOSE TWELVE AMBASSADORS

AFTER having gone through the towns and villages of Galilee, Jesus once more returned to 'His own City,' Capernaum, and sought shelter as before beneath the roof of Simon Peter. He came back as quietly and secretly as He went away, but the news that He had returned soon spread, and, before long, eager crowds were besieging the house where He was, in the hope of looking once more upon His beautiful face and listening to the music of His gentle, loving words.

If Peter's house were not of the very poorest kind, it was probably built around a sort of square courtyard with a verandah or balcony running along each side of it, upon which the rooms of the house opened. There would be a passage leading into the courtyard from the street, and through this passage the crowd began to press, in such numbers that the courtyard was soon full to overflowing, and the doorway was completely blocked. Taking His stand upon the balcony, and surrounded by some of the more important people, Scribes and Pharisees and Doctors (or teachers) of the law, who had made their way in with the rest, Jesus began to speak to the people, and to teach them the way of life.

But in the midst of His discourse a sudden and start-

ling interruption takes place. On the outskirts of the crowd, four men carrying a litter, upon which lay a poor paralysed man, had for some time been anxiously trying to force their way into Jesus' presence. But the courtyard is packed full. Try as they might they cannot get near Him. They are in despair. Suddenly in their difficulty and distress a brilliant thought occurs to them. Why not carry their sick friend up the outside staircase of the house which led up to the roof, and make a hole in the tiling of the verandah, and let him down at the feet of Jesus? It would not be a very difficult thing to do. The tiling could easily be removed, and they would only need to borrow a length of cord to tie to each corner of the litter, and the thing was done.

No sooner thought of than carried out! In a twinkling the sick man is carried to the top of the house and the roof is uncovered. A few whispered words, and a little shuffling of feet, and to the surprise of everybody, through the great hole that is torn open, a big bundle comes slowly dangling down, apparently from the sky, like a spider at the end of its web! It is the sick man upon his litter. Another moment and he is lying at the feet of Jesus.

It was a clever, daring trick, but Jesus was not displeased at it. It showed faith both on the part of the sick man and his friends—faith which laughs at difficulties and meets them only to overcome them. And Jesus loved faith. He looked up at the men on the roof and caught the eager, expectant look on their rough honest faces; He looked at the man at His feet, and saw the light of faith and hope shining in his eyes as well, and it was enough. He did not ask the sick man what he wanted at His hands. He knew what he wanted, for His eyes could read the sufferer's heart. 'Child, take courage; thy sins be forgiven thee,' come His words.

It seemed a strange thing to say. Was not Jesus making a mistake? The man who lay before Him was sick of a terrible disease. His friends had brought him to Jesus to be healed. But, instead of driving away his paralysis, He forgives him his sins. Why was this? Dear child, I think Jesus gave the better gift first because He knew it was the gift that was needed most. Perhaps, who knows, in the past the sick man had been living a sinful, careless life, till God at last sent the stern-faced Angel of Sorrow into his life to turn his feet into a better way. He had laid the sick man aside from the world, and in the quiet of his sickroom had given him time to think over his sins, and to repent of them. And now in the presence of Jesus the poor paralytic felt how sinful he had been, and how he had wasted his life; and he was sorry, and longed with all his heart to be forgiven. Jesus saw all this; He saw the sick man's sorrow, and how the weight of his sin was pressing him down, and so He spoke the word which rolled the heavy burden past, and gave the restless, aching heart the peace for which it longed. Paralysed—unable to stir hand or foot—there could have been no happier soul in all that great crowd than the sick man when those words of Jesus reached him. His bodily sickness would be forgotten, he would only lift his thankful eyes to Jesus' face in silent gratitude for the healing of his soul.

But the Scribes and Pharisees were angry. What would Jesus be saying next? What did He mean by pretending to a power which only the Most High God possessed?—He, the low-born peasant teacher, the carpenter from Nazareth? They did not say all this in so many words, but they thought it; and Jesus read their thoughts. Turning to them He put a question to them. Which would be the easier thing to do; to say to the

sick man, 'Thy sins be forgiven thee,' or to say, 'Arise, and walk?' He knew what the only answer could be. It would be as easy to say the one as the other. Any one could *say*, 'Thy sins be forgiven thee,' just as any one could *say*, 'Arise, and walk.' The question was, would any result follow on these words? Well, of course, it was impossible to prove that the words of forgiveness He had just spoken had really taken effect, but perhaps if He showed that by a word He had the power to heal the sick man's body, they would believe that by a word He could also heal and bless his soul. And so, with the words 'That ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins,' He bids the paralysed man arise and take up his bed and go home to his house.

And at Jesus' words life comes back to the poor, numb, half-dead body; the helpless limbs receive strength, and the man bows himself at Jesus' feet, cured alike in body and in soul. Then, while the Pharisees and Doctors stand by in silence and confusion, he shoulders his sleeping-mat; and the people, as they make way for him to pass, join their praises to God with his, and are filled with wonder and amazement, saying, 'We have seen strange things to-day.'

Soon after this Jesus added another disciple to those whom He had already called. This was Levi—or Matthew as he afterwards named himself in memory of his call.

He was a publican, a tax-collector, as the word means, and carried on his business at one of the Capernaum toll-gates. It was his work to take toll of the merchants and fisherfolk who brought their wares to Capernaum across the blue waters of the lake, or perhaps to collect the dues on the dried fish and corn and olive oil which left Capernaum by the great main roads which led to the seacoast, to Damascus, to Tyre, and to Jerusalem.

As Judæa at this time was under Roman rule, the taxes thus collected were Roman taxes and went to the imperial treasury. The Roman officers who were responsible for the collection of the money did not gather it themselves, however, but employed a class of men called publicans to collect it for them. These publicans, as a rule, were drawn from a very low class, and were cordially detested and hated by all with whom they had to do. The Jews acknowledged God alone to be their King, and hated the very thought of being in bondage to any man. They thus had little mercy for the man who could sink so low as to collect taxes for the foreigner. Men turned their backs upon the publican with one consent. He was looked upon as a renegade and a traitor. No one had a kind word for him; no one would sit down to table with him. His witness would not be taken in a court of law; the very beggar spurned his alms. No wonder that, treated like a dog, the publican showed his teeth; no wonder that, despised and shunned and ill-treated, he revenged himself by cheating and defrauding his enemies. To show a person that you think there is no good in him at all, is the best way to go to work to quench the little spark of good that may still be burning in his heart, and make him wholly bad.

But there was one who could see good even in a publican, and that was Jesus. It was always His way to see good in everybody and everything. There is an old legend which tells us that as He passed through the market-place of a certain city one day, He saw a knot of people gathered together looking at some object on the ground. And He drew near to see what it might be. It was a dead dog with a halter round his neck, by which he appeared to have been dragged through the dirt, and a viler, a more unclean thing never met the eye of man.

And those who stood by looked on in disgust. 'It pollutes the whole street,' said one. 'How long,' asked another, 'shall this foul beast offend our sight?' 'Look at his torn hide,' said a third. 'And his ears,' said a fourth, 'all draggled and bleeding.' 'No doubt,' said a fifth, 'he has been hanged for thieving.' And Jesus heard them; and looking down compassionately on the dead creature He said, 'Pearls cannot equal the whiteness of his teeth.'

Then the people turned to Him in amazement, and said among themselves—

'Who is this? This must be the Prophet of Nazareth, for only He could find something to pity and approve even in a dead dog.'

It is only a story this, but it teaches us a great truth. 'Jesus,' it has been truly said, 'always found the beautiful things. He always heard songs of angels or the voice of God when others heard only the sound of thunder. He saw flowers where others only saw the thorns. He saw the stars where those about Him saw only muddy roads. He found hope where others only found despair.'

Jesus' eye had marked Levi as he sat at work in his little office by the seashore. He had read his heart and seen in it the desire for better things, and had judged him worthy of a nobler calling. He knew there were the makings of an apostle and a saint in the poor publican whom every one despised; it should be His task to train him to become both. Levi, in his turn, had been drawn to Jesus. He had doubtless heard many of His wonderful sermons on the beach, and the words that Jesus spoke had taken hold of his heart, and his thoughts had already begun to turn away from the gold of earth to the better gold of Heaven. When therefore the clear call came he obeyed it without delay.

God's call to higher service generally comes to people when they are treading just the ordinary everyday path of duty, and it was so with Levi. Jesus had walked down to the toll-gate where Levi was sitting, busy with his accounts. As He passed by He looked earnestly at him and uttered the words 'Follow Me.' And Levi arose and followed Jesus. He threw up his home, his money—everything, to become His disciple. It was not a trifling thing to do, even for a publican. It meant leaving a business by which he had become, or might easily become, very rich. It meant giving up a comfortable house, a good situation, and all for what? To follow One who had nothing to give him in the way of earthly reward in return—One who had no settled home, and but few real friends—One whose service was likely to prove hard and dangerous and disappointing. Yet he did not hesitate. The love he felt for Jesus drew him as by a silver cord.

'I heard Him call—

"Come, follow!" that was all.

My gold grew dim:

My soul went after Him:

I rose and "followed": that was all!

Who would not "follow!" if they heard His call?

Soon after this—perhaps on the day when he had settled up his affairs, and said a last good-bye to his old work—Levi, or Matthew, as he now began to call himself, made a great feast, to which he invited Jesus and His disciples. It must have been a feast very like that which Jesus afterwards described in one of His parables, where the very lowest and commonest of the people sat down together at a great supper—men gathered together out of the highways and hedges. For there were no grand people present in purple and fine linen; only the poor and the outcast, the publican and sinner.

Many of these strange guests had been St. Matthew's old friends and companions, and he had gathered them all together in order that they might all have an opportunity of meeting Jesus, and of winning some such blessing for their poor, evil, sin-stained lives, as he himself had won. He knew Jesus would not despise the very worst, for had He not just called him, a publican, to be His disciple? He knew Jesus longed to save the outcast and lost, for had He not just stretched out His hand to save an outcast? And so Jesus came to Matthew's feast, and ate and drank with the strange company that had gathered there. And when the feast was at an end, the poor outcasts would gather round Him, and He would speak to them, oh! so tenderly, of the great Father in Heaven who loved the meanest of His children and had sent His Son to show them the path of life, and to guide their wandering feet into the way of peace. He would tell them that there was no respect of persons with God, but that God loved all men alike; that He longed after each, that He wanted the love of each. He would tell them that it was never too late to repent of sin; that God waited to forgive the sinner, and that the worst could find a welcome in the Father's Home.

How eagerly these poor publicans and sinners, whom everybody despised, would listen as Jesus spoke. Then they were really worth something after all; it really mattered how they lived; God cared, if no one else did. How wonderful it seemed! And eyes would fill with tears and hard hearts melt as Jesus' words went home; and from that day forward many would turn their backs upon their evil past and begin to climb 'the steep ascent' which leads to holiness and Heaven.

The news that Levi the publican had given a dinner to his old friends and companions, and that Jesus had sat

down to eat and drink with them, soon spread abroad, and people were surprised and not a little shocked at Jesus' condescension. The Pharisees were especially scandalised. They could not understand how One, who claimed to be a Teacher come from God, should go out of His way to show kindness to people whom every decent person shunned. Still less could they understand how Jesus could sink Himself to the level of these people, by eating and drinking with them at the same table. What could it mean? Surely there must be some deep motive behind so strange an act. It made them curious to find out what that motive could possibly be. And so they came to Jesus' disciples and put the question to them, 'Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?'

Jesus overheard their question and answered it Himself. There was indeed a deep motive in His doing what He had done, only it was a motive which their hard and narrow hearts would find it difficult to understand. The publicans and sinners were sunken in sin, and He had gone down among them in order to lend them His hand to raise them up. They needed His help, that is why He had stooped to help them. Had they not been outcasts and sinners, there would have been no reason for His troubling about them. It was the sick man who had need of a doctor, not the man who was well and strong; and the publican and sinner were sick; sick with the most awful of all diseases, sin; and they knew it and wanted to be cured.

They, the Scribes and Pharisees, were sick too; only they did not know it. They felt no need of a physician, and so He had not come to them. But though they were so satisfied with themselves, God was not satisfied with them. Let them go and learn the lesson God taught of old, by the mouth of one of the old prophets, hundreds of

years before. 'I will have mercy and not sacrifice.' It was better to have a loving heart than to be full of outward service, better to feel pity for the sinful and fallen than to be strict in paying tithes and offering up all kinds of sacrifices in the Temple. If the publican was so degraded and so lost, why not try to make him better, instead of standing by and pointing the finger of scorn at him? As it was, it was to the lowly publican that the call to enter God's Kingdom had come; the self-righteous Pharisee was in danger of being left outside altogether.

There was another question which Jesus answered about this time—a question about fasting. St. Matthew's feast took place on one of the fasting days of the Jews, and the disciples of St. John the Baptist, who had been taught to observe these days, were curious to know why Jesus did not teach His disciples to observe them as well. Jesus had not taught His disciples to fast on certain set days; He had not, as far as we know, taught them to fast at all; though a little later on, in His great Sermon on the Mount, He seems to take it for granted that they fasted, and tells them how they ought to fast aright. In answer to their question, Jesus makes it clear that there must be a proper motive for fasting; some better motive than merely because certain days were put aside for it. The time was coming when He should be taken away from His disciples, and then they would have good reason for fasting, and would fast for grief and sorrow of heart. While He was with them, however, it was not natural that they should fast and be sad, any more than for guests to fast and be sad at a happy wedding party, with the bridegroom standing in their midst.

And then Jesus went on to show that there were many customs which were observed by religious Jews, which would not be binding on the subjects of the new

Kingdom He was about to set up. The old rules and regulations which hedged in the worship and service of God were passing away. It would be as foolish to try to mix the old law and the new gospel, as it would be to try to patch an old garment with a new piece of cloth—the edges would not hold together. It would be like putting new and unfermented wine into old goatskin bottles—the bottles would burst and the wine would be spilled.

Shortly after this Jesus made up the number of His disciples to twelve, and gathered them together into one company, and began to train them for the work they would have to do after He had gone back to Heaven, the great and important work of carrying on His Church.

But before doing this He left Capernaum as evening fell, and, making His way towards the western hills, He again sought His Heavenly Father's face in prayer. 'Brought up among the hills, Jesus was ever fond of their solitude, their pure air, and open sky, which seemed to bring Him nearer His Father.' This time He spent the whole night in prayer; praying, we may believe, not only for Himself, but for the twelve He had chosen to be His apostles or 'messengers'; asking God's blessing upon them and the glad message of salvation they should carry to the world.

At last morning dawned, and, ascending the hillside, the disciples made their way to Jesus' side. They were already bound together by the common tie of love they bore their Master. To-day they were to be united even more closely still. Jesus' eye rests lovingly upon each in turn as they stand before Him, and then He calls them each by name, and one by one they kneel at His feet, as He solemnly separates them for the work of the ministry.

First would come the three we seem to know best, and whom we always find 'linked together by a golden chain' in the Gospel story—St. Peter, St. James, and St. John. They were the disciples whom Jesus trusted most, and to whom He gave special proofs of His tenderness and love. Then would follow St. Andrew, the missionary disciple who brought people to Jesus.

Afterwards would come St. Philip, the 'sincere but timid seeker after truth'; then St. Bartholomew, the Nathanael whom Jesus saw under the fig-tree, and who, an old legend tells us, was a gardener; then St. Matthew the publican; then St. Thomas, slow to believe yet quick to lose and hazard all for Christ.

Another little group, and the twelve would be complete—St. James 'the little,' so called because he was small of stature like St. Paul; St. Jude, the 'brave-hearted' man who, in the epistle he afterwards wrote, bids us 'earnestly contend for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints'; St. Simon, member of the fierce Jewish sect called the Zealots, because of their fiery zeal for their country and their religion. Last of all Judas Iscariot, who bears the awful name of 'traitor,' the man who afterwards sold his Master for thirty pieces of silver.

Such were the apostles whom Jesus called to be His chief helpers in setting up the Kingdom of Heaven on earth—that kingdom which has outlived so many earthly kingdoms—which is with us now, and which shall never pass away, the kingdom we call the Church.

We shall follow their history as we follow the history of Jesus, but I should like you to notice just two things about them now.

First, we can hardly imagine twelve men more unlike. They differed in character 'as one star differeth from another star in glory.' And yet Jesus found a work for

each to do, the very work which suited each the best. Just as the watchmaker fits the right wheel into the right part of a watch, so Jesus fitted each apostle into the place God intended him to fill. And so we learn that God has room for all kinds of characters in His Church, and has a work for each to do—

‘There’s not a child so small and weak
But has his little cross to take,
His little work of faith and love
That he may do for Jesus’ sake.’

Some are fitted for one kind of work, and some for another. To some it falls to do great and noble deeds for God; others are only able to do little loving ones; yet the work we are able to do is just the work God wants us to do; and the place in which He puts us is the place which no one can rightly fill except ourselves.

Secondly, we notice how poor and humble and unimportant were the men whom Jesus chose to be the pillars of His Church. Most of them were common fisherfolk from Galilee; one was perhaps a gardener, another (St. Philip), it is thought, was a charioteer, another, one of the despised and hated publicans. And yet God used these few poor common working-men to do the greatest work the world has ever seen or dreamt of. And so again we learn that it is not always the grandest and most important people that God has most use for; it is often the people who seem to be of the least importance, ‘the poor of this world rich in faith’; the meek and lowly and humble of heart. I may only be a little child, and yet, if I do my best to serve God and let my light shine, God may yet make my life a blessing to the world. There is not one little act of mine, one whispered prayer that God’s Kingdom may come, that ever goes for nothing. I must never think I

am too small and weak to be of use to God. 'If,' says a good man, 'I can only place one little golden brick in the pavement of the King's highway, let me place it there. Coming generations shall yet walk thereon on their way to the Heavenly City.'

VIII

THE KING ON THE MOUNT OF BLESSING

THE place where Jesus spent the night in prayer, before choosing His twelve apostles, is thought to have been a mountain which rises on the western side of the Sea of Galilee, about three hours' journey from Capernaum. It is a mountain somewhat strangely shaped, being crowned by two horns or peaks, separated from one another by a stretch of green and level plain.

On descending into this plain, Jesus found it filled with a great multitude which had gathered together from the surrounding towns and villages in search of Him. His first care was to heal their sick, for the sick and suffering were always the special objects of compassion on the part of the Good Physician. Then, seated on some green mound or rocky boulder with His disciples and the crowd ranged around Him, He began the great discourse which we know by the name of the Sermon on the Mount.

It was a wonderful day in the world's history when Jesus opened His lips to that poor ignorant multitude upon the mountain. No teaching like His had ever been heard before. There on His mountain throne He sat like a great King, His palace carpet the green grass with its embroidery of many-coloured flowers, the ceiling above His head the sky's blue canopy, His chamber walls the shining mountain peaks. And as He sat He taught the glad news of a Kingdom of Heaven on earth which should never pass away. Who had ever dreamed of such a

kingdom as this before? Who could have imagined a kingdom with gates wide enough to take in all the world; a kingdom of love and peace and righteousness, where all men should live together as brothers, and where the weary and heavy-laden and the wandering and lost of every age and clime might find a home to the end of the world? Yet such was to be Jesus' Kingdom, the Church. He had that morning set up its foundations; now He begins to describe its character and to lay down the rules by which it is to be governed.

As we think of Jesus upon His mountain throne, proclaiming the laws of His Kingdom, we are reminded of that other wonderful scene of old when God came down to Sinai to give the ten commandments to His people. Both the old and the new law are given by God, and from a mountain. And yet how different the two scenes are.

There God appeared in His awful majesty, so that 'the earth shook and the heavens also dropped' at His presence; here He is seen 'found in fashion as a man,' seated lovingly amidst His people. Then the voice of thunder was heard upon the mountain; now the quiet voice of Jesus sounds 'soft and winning as the sunshine on the flowers.' Then the people greatly feared and quaked and were forbidden to touch the mountain on pain of death; now they are invited to sit at Jesus' feet, and as they sit they listen with rapt and eager faces. Then, too, there were threatenings and warnings to the disobedient; now God speaks peace to His people, and His message is one of mercy and hope and blessing.

The sermon begins by describing the character of the citizens of the Kingdom—

'Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.'

Jesus put this beautiful picture before the multitude to show them what kind of people He expected His disciples to be. All these different precepts taken together form the character of the true Christian. As we look into the picture, do we not see what the copy set before us really is? Does not a face seem to grow out of the canvas, the face of the King Himself?

And yet these 'Beatitudes,' as they are called, must have sounded strangely in the ears of the listening people. The Jews were apt to think that God would be satisfied if they gave Him a measure of outward service and were careful to perform certain religious duties. Jesus says, 'No! it is not the doing, but the being that is the important thing. It is the pure in heart to whom God grants the vision of His face; it is those who feel their own unworthiness, it is those who are willing to suffer reproach for My sake to whom His Kingdom rightly belongs.' In a word, Jesus tells us that the Blessed of God are those who have the Heavenly mind. The true citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven is he who reflects the likeness of Christ the King.

The words that immediately follow the Beatitudes are perhaps more especially addressed to the disciples whom Jesus had only that morning chosen to be the chief officers of His Kingdom. They are to be the salt that shall keep the world from becoming corrupt; let them take care not to be like salt that has lost its savour; in

other words, let them keep the power of influencing others for good by keeping near to God themselves. They are to be lights, torches kindled at the source of all light, Jesus Christ Himself; it should be their work to give light to the world and make it bright with the knowledge and love of God; let them see that they keep their light burning and not allow its shining to be hidden or grow dim. 'Let your light,' He bids them, 'so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven.'

After this Jesus began to compare the old law of Mount Sinai with the new law of the Gospel. He had not come, He said, to set aside the old law, but to fulfil it, to bring out its hidden meaning, to carry it from the outside of the life into the heart and conscience. The world of old had been taught by God just as much as it was able to learn; now the time had come for harder and deeper lessons to be put before it. Religion, Jesus taught, was not a thing which had to do with outward actions only, it must enter into and colour a man's whole life.

There was the law of murder. The old law taught that one man must not kill another, but it said nothing about his hating him and wishing to kill him or do him hurt. Jesus taught that it was not enough to keep from murder; you must keep from those bad feelings which sometimes lead on to murder; you must get rid of the angry, revengeful thought; you must check the hasty, bitter word. Or there was the old law of impurity. The old law laid down that it was wrong to be impure in act; but Jesus went further, and said that God required purity of heart, that the children of the kingdom were to keep their very inmost thoughts free from taint and defilement. So with God's other laws, the law of oaths, of repayment of injuries and the rest; they were to be kept not in the letter but in the spirit.

It was not the mere words of the commandment that mattered ; you must go deeper than the words, you must get at the meaning that underlay them.

And then having compared the old and the new law together, Jesus went on to compare the old and the new life. The life which people had grown accustomed to look upon as the highest and most religious was the kind of life lived by the Scribes and Pharisees, but Jesus said that the righteousness of those who would enter His Kingdom must exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, it must be of a different and an altogether higher kind.

In the religion of the Pharisees there was plenty of outside show, but very little reality. The right things they did, they did from a wrong motive ; they were very particular about performing their religious duties with great exactness, but it was not through any real love to God and desire to please Him, but rather to gain credit for themselves. The Pharisee gave alms, only he did not give in the right way. He parted with his money, not because he was sorry for the poor and the distressed and wanted to help them, but because he wanted to gain a name for being generous. He took care that every one should know how much he gave away. He was like an actor playing a part ; his charity was all a pretence. Jesus said that the children of the Kingdom were not to give like this ; when they gave they were to give quietly, lovingly, and without display. God would see what they gave, and would reward the true-hearted giver openly. Again the Pharisee prayed. He was very fond of praying, only here again he was only acting a part. He would stand in his long flowing robes in the synagogue, or at the corner of a street where there were sure to be plenty of people about, and pray long and loudly, but always with an eye to effect—not because he wanted to speak to God, but because he wanted people to admire him and to say,

‘What a holy man that is; what beautiful prayers he offers up!’ Jesus taught the children of the Kingdom that they must scorn to make a show of their religion in this way. When they prayed let them go aside from the busy crowd, and in the quiet of their chamber speak to the great God who is in secret, and He, their Father, whose eyes were in every place, would hear their prayer and bless them, so that the world could not fail to take knowledge of it.¹

Once more, the Pharisee fasted. He made a great parade of his fasts. On fasting days he went about with untrimmed beard, and with ashes sprinkled over his head; while his face wore a set look of melancholy and woe. But all this was not because he was really humbling himself before God on account of his sins, but because he wanted people to imagine he was doing so. Jesus said the children of the Kingdom must fast for God’s eyes, not man’s; the world need not even know they were fasting and denying themselves, it was enough that God should know it.

Though the Kingdom of Jesus was to be a kingdom set up on earth, yet in its character it was not to be an earthly but a Heavenly Kingdom, and so the children of the kingdom must be taught to be Heavenly-minded, to set their affections on the things of Heaven. Accordingly Jesus goes on to tell His disciples not to lay up treasure on earth, but to seek the true riches. Earthly treasure does not last; hoarded coin grows rusty; the grandest clothes become moth-eaten and spoiled at last; a man is rich to-day, to-morrow he is robbed of all. It is different with the Heavenly treasure, that never spoils nor can be taken away. Love then Heavenly things is Jesus’ teach-

¹ The Lord’s Prayer, which follows here, will be found in a later chapter. It seems to have been given twice by our Lord; once to the multitude upon the mountain, and again towards the close of His ministry, as a model prayer for His disciples

ing; care most for pleasing God and doing His will, and fill up your lives with beautiful actions and loving words, the things that never die. Remember the heart follows the treasure; if you lift your treasure up to Heaven it will draw your heart to Heaven also.

But is it not possible to have your treasure laid up on earth and in Heaven at the same time? 'No,' answers Jesus; 'no man can serve two masters; you must either put God first or the world first; you cannot be a friend of both.' But if I turn my back on the world and its ways, shall I not be in danger of coming to want? 'No,' says Jesus again, 'choose God as your friend; trust Him to take care of you. He is your loving Father, and He will not let you want. You need not fret about the future, or be over anxious about the things which have to do with daily life. Look at the birds darting above your head through the warm spring air, how happy, how free from care they are; you do not find them sowing nor reaping nor gathering into barns, yet your Heavenly Father feeds them. Look at the flowers at your feet; not even the great King Solomon in his royal robes was ever arrayed as beautifully as a flower; yet the flower does not weave its lovely dress for itself, it is God that gives it all its beauty of form and colouring. If then God cares for the birds, if He clothes the little anemone with its scarlet cloak, and decks the amaryllis with a crown of gold, will He not much more feed and clothe you, who are so much better and dearer to Him than either birds or flowers? Only make God and the things of God your chief concern and you may safely leave all the rest to Him.'

And now having spoken of the debt of love and trust which the children of the Kingdom owe their Heavenly Father, Jesus adds a word about the way they should look upon and treat one another. They must not be fault-

finders, in a hurry to judge or condemn. Those who are always on the look-out for the faults of others, and are hard and severe upon them, must expect to be severely treated themselves by God. First look at home, is Jesus' advice; find your own faults out; when you have got rid of your own great faults it will be time enough to think of the lesser faults of your neighbours. Think how good God is to you, hearing your prayers, giving you the things you need, befriending you in all kinds of ways. Because God is good to you, be good in your turn to others. Treat them as you would wish to be treated yourself.

This commandment of Jesus is called the golden rule. It is really one of the most important rules of the Kingdom. 'The perfect working of this rule everywhere would make Heaven,' it has been said, and it is true; for if every one were as considerate and thoughtful for the welfare and happiness of others as he is about himself, there would be no quarrelling or bad feeling, no wrong or oppression; the will of God would then be done by men as it is done by the holy angels.

Before bringing His sermon to a close, Jesus spoke of the choice of the two roads. There were two roads, He taught, through the world—the hard and narrow way of service and the cross, and the broad and easy road of self-pleasing and of sin. Each of these two ways had a gate of entrance, the one strait (or narrow), and the other wide.

But because the entrance gate was narrow, and so shut out many of the joys of life, and because the way itself was straitened and hard to tread, those who found the Heavenly way of service were few in number. On the other hand the path of self-pleasing had no lack of travellers because it was so smooth and broad, and because as one entered through its gate there was nothing that need

be left behind. Yet it was the way of service which the children of the Kingdom must choose; they must strive, they must do their utmost to enter in at the strait gate, for the narrow way to which it led was the way of life, it was the King's highway and led up to God, whereas the broad and easy path led away from Him and ended in darkness and death—

‘ Oh, what is this pathway white, with parapets of light,
Whose slender links go up, go up, and meet in Heaven high?
’Tis the Road of the Loving Heart from earth to sky.

‘ Who made the beautiful road? It was the Son of God,
Of Mary born in Bethlehem. He planned it first, and then
Up the Road of the Loving Heart He led all men.

‘ Was it not hard to build? Yes, all His years were filled
With labour, but He counted not the cost nor was afraid;
No Road of the Loving Heart is cheaply made.’

And now before sending the multitude away Jesus gives them one last word of solemn warning. He had been speaking and they had been listening; He had laid down the laws of His Kingdom, and described the character that the children of the Kingdom must strive to attain. But it was not enough to hear; the hearers must become doers. The sermon had been preached, now it must be practised; and so He ends with the parable of the two houses.

There were two men who, each of them, set about building a house for himself. The one laid the foundation of his dwelling on a rock, the other on the shifting sand. One night a great storm arose, the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon the houses. But while the house that was built upon the rock remained unshaken, the house that was built on the

sand collapsed, fell to pieces, and became a ruin. Jesus said that those who heard His sayings and did them were like the wise builder, while those who heard and did not were like the foolish one. Take care how you build, He seems to say to us in this parable. You have each got to build your life up for yourselves, see first of all that you get your foundations right. Let your life rest upon My teaching as on a rock. Then in the day of storm, wind, and tempest, when temptation assails you and earth's trials test your steadfastness to the uttermost, the house of your life will stand strong and immovable—otherwise it will only fall and crumble into ruins.

‘And it came to pass,’ we read, ‘when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at His doctrine (or teaching): for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the Scribes.’

IX

THE CRIPPLE AT THE HOUSE OF MERCY—HOW THE
DISCIPLES PLUCKED THE EARS OF CORN—THE
STONE-MASON WITH THE WITHERED HAND—THE
ROMAN SOLDIER AND HIS SICK SLAVE—HOW JESUS
RAISED A DEAD MAN TO LIFE AT PLEASANT NAIN

It was the time of one of the feasts, and Jesus left Capernaum to go once more to the Holy City. While at Jerusalem He worked another wonderful miracle.

He was passing by the Sheep Gate, where the cattle for the Temple sacrifices were bought and sold. Close to this gate lay a pool of water known as Bethesda, or the House of Mercy, because of the wonderful healing powers its waters were supposed to possess. The pool was fed by a spring which, after ceasing to flow perhaps for a long time, would suddenly begin to bubble up ; and when this happened the people used to think that an angel was moving upon the waters. At such times they would bring their sick and dip them into the pool, in the belief that while the rush of water lasted the pool had the magic power of healing disease.

A stone arcade had been built about the pool, with five chambers, each with steps running down into the water. At the time when Jesus passed by, the building was crowded with sick people, eagerly waiting their chance of being cured.

Among the crowd of sufferers, the blind, the lame, and

the paralysed, Jesus' eye singled out one man, a cripple, stretched upon his pallet, and only just able to move. For thirty-eight years he had been in that sad state. The doctors had long given him up; one by one his friends had dropped away; and as he lay there, helpless and uncared for, there was perhaps no more miserable, despairing heart in all Jerusalem.

Jesus knew what a long time the sick man had been laid by, and was sorry for him. He knew too that his sickness had been brought about by sin; but He was going to give him the chance of redeeming his evil past. Would he like to be healed? He asks him.

Ah! how the sick man would like it. That is the one thing he has been longing and praying for, all these long and weary years. What would he not give to have his health and strength restored? But alas! he is friendless. He has no one to carry him down to the pool when the water begins to stir, and by the time he has dragged himself to the steps, the swirl of the water has ceased; the angel has taken flight; it is too late.

'Rise, take up thy bed, and walk,' comes Jesus' voice, and the man looks up, and as he gazes into Jesus' face his dull despondent look is changed to one of wondering joy. He believes in Jesus' power; he rises to his feet, takes up his sleeping-mat, and leaves the House of Mercy, cured.

Jesus afterwards met the man He had healed, in the Temple, whither he had gone, no doubt, to thank God for his cure. He spoke kindly to him and urged him to forsake his sins and to lead a better life, lest God should send him an even worse punishment than before.

Now it was the Sabbath day when Jesus healed the crippled man, and the rulers of the Jews were shocked at the sight of a man carrying his sleeping-mat in the open street. No one might carry any burden on the Sabbath

day. A man was not even allowed to carry money in his pocket or a stick in his hand. A tailor might not go out with a needle on Friday afternoon, in case he forgot to lay it aside before the Sabbath drew on. Even a cock might not wear a rag round its leg, or an ass carry its bell when being led to water. Imagine then the anger of these people when they found out that Jesus had given the man permission to carry his bed. Who was this new teacher that He should set their Sabbath rules at defiance in this way? Still more angry were they, when, in answer to their complaints Jesus claimed the right of doing acts of mercy and love on the Sabbath day as well as on any other, because, as He said, He was the Son of God, Himself the Greatest of all Workers, who never for a single instant ceased to work for His children's good.

From this time forth the Jewish rulers began to plot against Jesus. He was evidently a dangerous teacher, who if He got His way would turn everything upside down. Already He had begun to undermine their authority; by and by He would win the people over to His side, and then their position and authority would be lost. Could they not get rid of Him before His power became too great?

Sad at heart, Jesus went back to Galilee. And now again it was the Sabbath day, and the Master and His disciples, having attended service at the synagogue, were making their way homewards through the wheatfields. All was quiet and peaceful. The blue of the Sabbath sky was above their heads, and the sunshine lay upon hill and valley like the smile of God, brightening the fair green stretches of the countryside and turning to gold the fields of yellowing corn, through which they passed.

Hungry, and with perhaps no prospect of getting other food to eat, the disciples began to pluck the ears of

corn and to rub them in their hands. No sooner, however, had they begun to do this than a company of Jewish spies, who had followed them in the hope of catching Jesus tripping, darted out upon them and began to accuse them of Sabbath-breaking.

The law was merciful enough to allow a hungry traveller to pluck a handful of corn ears, or even to gather a bunch of grapes, as he passed along on his way, only he must not do it on the Sabbath. The Jews taught that to pluck corn on the Sabbath day was really to reap it, and to rub it in the hands was a kind of threshing, and to reap and thresh on the Sabbath day was a sin worthy of stoning.

Now Jesus loved and honoured God's day, and taught His disciples to love and honour it as well, but to treat it as the Jews treated it, was, He knew, the very way to degrade and bring it into contempt. And so in answer to the angry words of the spies, He told them that they were doing their best to spoil God's beautiful gift. God had given them the Sabbath day to be a blessing and a help to them, and not that it should be turned into a burden and a snare. He also told them that He was the Lord of the Sabbath, and so the only proper judge as to the right way of keeping it. Soon after this Jesus was again attacked by the Jews, because, as they thought, He broke the Sabbath day.

He was in the synagogue—perhaps the beautiful white marble synagogue of Capernaum—and He noticed, among the poorer people crowded together at the door, a man who had a withered hand. An old legend tells us that the man was a stone-mason, and that, having lost the use of his hand, he was no longer able to work at his trade. In his distress, and to save him from the disgrace of becoming a beggar, he had come to seek Jesus' aid.

The Scribes and Pharisees had noticed this man as well, and were eagerly watching to see whether he would catch Jesus' eye and attract his pity; not because they were sorry for the sufferer, but because they hoped Jesus would heal him, and so enable them to bring another charge against Him of breaking the Sabbath day.

For this was another of the hard rules with which the Jews had fenced about the Sabbath. No one was to take medicine, no one was to relieve a fellow-sufferer, unless it was a case of life and death.

Jesus knew He was being watched; He knew His enemies were trying to catch Him in a trap; but He was not one to be frightened out of doing what was right, because there was a lion in the way. He always trod the straight path, and trod it unafraid and with the step of a King, no matter how full of danger it might be.

'Stand forth,' came His command; and the man with the withered hand came forward and stood before Him. And then Jesus put a question to His enemies, 'Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to destroy it?'

Surely there could be but one answer to a question like this? Any really noble heart would say that it was a good and not an evil thing to have mercy upon a poor afflicted sufferer, and give him back the power of earning his daily bread. Was not a man better than a sheep? and who would not go to the help even of a sheep, if it should fall into a pit on the Sabbath day? But Jesus got no answer to His question, and when, on looking round for signs of relenting, He saw instead nothing but scowling, wrathful looks bent upon Him, He was filled with grief and indignation. What could be made of such men as these, without a spark of common pity or touch of human love?

'Stretch forth thine hand,' He says to the man before Him, and the poor stone-mason obeys. He does not say, 'O Lord, I cannot. See! my hand is withered.' He has faith in Jesus' power; he makes the effort, and with the effort comes the strength, 'And his hand was restored whole as the other.'

Meanwhile the Scribes and Pharisees were 'filled with madness,' St. Luke tells us, since Jesus had once more put them in the wrong. So great was their anger that they went out and joined forces with their enemies the Herodians—followers of Herod the King, whom they hated and despised—in order to gain their help in putting Jesus to death.

We saw that the white marble synagogue of Capernaum was the gift of a Roman officer, the Centurion who commanded the soldiers stationed in the town. The Romans as a rule looked with suspicion and dislike upon the Jews, who repaid their contempt with bitter hatred.

But the Centurion seems to have found much to love in the people, among whom his lot had been cast. He did not treat them in any harsh, overbearing fashion; on the contrary, he showed them many marks of kindness, and in return he had won their gratitude and esteem.

In Rome he had been a heathen, a worshipper of Jupiter and Mars and Vulcan, and all the other Roman gods, but since he had been stationed at Capernaum he had learned to believe in the One True God, and had turned his back on his idols.

Living at Capernaum as he did, he must often have heard of Jesus, and no doubt had seen Him as well; and if so, the face and bearing of Jesus would make a great impression on him. As a Roman soldier he was accustomed to look on the faces of great men, for the men he

served were the masters of the world; but a glance at Jesus' face would tell him that good and noble and heroic as many of these great leaders were, here was a Leader of men, greater, better, nobler far than they. And so, when the time came for him to need a friend's hand, he at once thought of Jesus.

Just as in the case of the nobleman, it was sickness which led him to Jesus, the sickness of one he loved. He had a slave, a lad maybe, who had been stolen away from some far-distant land, or had been captured in battle. Brought up at his side, the boy had grown dear to him almost as a son; and now he was sick and ready to die. 'Ah! if Jesus could only be got to lend His aid,' thinks the good Centurion, 'I should save my dear lad yet.'

And so, because he is too humble-minded to go himself, he sends for the Jewish elders and entreats them to go and find Jesus for him and beseech His help. And they come to Jesus and tell Him of the Centurion's trouble, and how kind and good and generous a friend he had been to them, and beg Him to come and heal the dying lad. And Jesus answers simply, 'I will come and heal him.'

But before He reaches the house, the Centurion, to whom the glad news, 'Jesus is coming,' has already been brought, hastily sends out friends to meet the Lord, and entreat Him to come no further. He was not worthy, he said, that Jesus should come under his roof. Let Him but speak the word, and his servant would be healed. 'For I also,' he went on to say, 'am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.'

What did he mean by these words? I think he meant something like this—I am not a soldier of the highest

rank, but yet I have men under me to carry out my wishes. If I want a thing done, I need not go myself to do it; I have only to give my orders to a soldier and he carries them out. If I, a poor Centurion with only a few soldiers to command, have such power; how much greater power must you have, who are the Son of God and commander of many legions of angels? You need not come to my house to spread your hands upon my dying slave. You need only speak the word, and the Angel of Death who is hovering over my house will take his flight, and the Angel of Life will enter in with healing in his wings.

When Jesus heard this He was astonished, and turning to the crowd that had begun to gather around Him, He told them that it had been left to a Roman soldier and a foreigner to show a faith in Him such as none of His own people had ever shown. And because of their faith, He went on to say, God would gather many Gentiles like this Centurion into His Heavenly Kingdom; while because of their unbelief the children of the kingdom, His own chosen people, should be cast out into the darkness. Then speaking to the messengers, He bids them go tell the Centurion that it should be done unto him according to his faith. And when they returned they found the Angel of Death flown, and the sick lad restored again to health.

We do not hear anything more of the good Centurion. Did he after this take Jesus for his Captain and join the ranks of the soldiers of the Cross? We do not know, but we like to think so. In any case the words which one of the old Fathers of the Church, St. Augustine, said of him are well deserved: 'In declaring himself unworthy that Christ should enter his house, he proved himself worthy that Christ should enter his heart.'

The day after, we find Jesus and His disciples at a little village called Nain. Nain was about twenty-three miles from Capernaum, and to reach it Jesus would either travel the whole distance on foot, or else, rising early in the morning, He would take boat and sail across the blue waters of the lake in the direction of the pleasure city of Tiberias; afterwards landing lower down and making His way southwards along the great Damascus road.

By and by He would reach a little cluster of green hills, which sloped down to the plain through which the road He was travelling ran. There, perched up high on the hill-side, a splash of white against the green, the little village could be plainly seen nestling among its trees.

The modern Nain, travellers tell us, is only a collection of miserable huts, but in Jesus' day it must have been a fair and pleasant spot. The very name tells us this, for the word Nain means 'beautiful,' and it had won its name, no doubt, because of its lovely situation, its bright and shady gardens, and fruitful orchards where 'the vines with the tender grape give a good smell.'

But to-day, in spite of the sunshine and the flowers and the joy of spring, pleasant Nain was plunged in gloom and sadness. A young man had died that very morning, the only son of a widowed mother; and as Jesus and His disciples were ascending the hill, the funeral procession was coming out of the gate. It was a very long procession as well as a sad one, for the young man had many friends, and nearly the whole village had turned out to show the sympathy and respect they felt for the poor desolate mother, in the hour of her anguish and distress.

There, in front of the bier, she was walking with bent head and streaming eyes—the mother mourning for her only son; while her neighbours pressed around her, mingling their tears with hers. And all the while, as

the procession wound its way along, cymbals clashed and the flutes gave out their melancholy wail, and the shrieks of the hired mourners rent the air.

At last the funeral train reached the spot where Jesus stood; and as He saw the weeping mother go by with bowed head and uncertain step, His heart was stirred with pity. Perhaps He thought of His own dear mother, and how soon *she* would be weeping over a dead body on its way to burial! Stepping forward, 'Weep not,' He gently says, while all gaze at Him in wonder.

Was it not a strange thing to say? Had she not good cause to weep? What could He mean, this 'fair-haired, sad-eyed Stranger, with the red dust upon His feet and clothes'? As the mourners ask one another the question in astonishment, Jesus lays His hand upon the bier, and at His touch the bearers lower the wicker-work coffin to the ground, and there, brought face to face with the Lord of Life, the dead man lies; his body framed in boughs of myrtle; his face uncovered; his hands folded on his breast.

What a solemn moment that must have been. A hush falls upon the crowd; every one wonders what is coming next.

Then Jesus speaks, and His voice is like the sound of many waters, 'Young man, I say unto thee, Arise.'

And at His words the spirit comes back to the lifeless body. The young man sits up, looks around him, and begins to speak. The next moment he is in his mother's arms.

Dear child, you remember how I told you that Jesus' work in healing men's bodies, was meant to picture to us His even more wonderful work in healing their souls. When He cured the leper by a touch, it was to show us His power to cure the awful leprosy of sin which spreads

and spreads until it causes death, and separates us from God and our home in Heaven. When He gave the poor paralysed man power to take up his bed and walk, it was to show again that He can give power to those unable to serve God, making them strong to follow the right and fight manfully under His banner against sin, the world, and the devil.

So here, when Jesus raised the dead man to life, it was His way of showing that He has power to raise even dead souls to life again. It was a kind of message to the world that no one need despair of forgiveness, but that there was hope even for the worst.

There is an old legend which tells us how a man who had spent his whole life in sin and wickedness at last repented and went about seeking some one to absolve him. But so awful had been his crimes that priest and bishop alike, as they heard his story, turned from him with horror and loathing. And so the wretched man wandered from shrine to shrine and from country to country, until he came to the Pope himself. The Pope was sitting in his garden, when, with wild eyes and haggard face, the man burst through the guards and fell at his feet and began to pour out his story of wrongdoing. But before he had got far, the Pope arose with a shudder and a cry, and, thrusting his staff into the ground, told the despairing sinner that as soon would that dry staff come to life again as that such a monster would be forgiven. Next day, as the Pope walked in his garden, he looked for his staff, and lo! it had taken root and had budded into leaf and flower, 'and he saw that there was pardon through the Precious Blood of Christ, even for the vilest sinners.'

Let us learn that lesson too. Let us learn to hope for all poor, lost souls, and to pray that, by God's mercy, they may even yet meet Jesus on the way, and hearing

His voice be raised up from the death of sin to the life of righteousness. 'For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world ; but that the world through Him might be saved.' And again, 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.'

X

ST. JOHN IN THE BLACK CASTLE—THE MURDER IN THE DUNGEON—SIMON THE PHARISEE AND THE WOMAN WHO WAS A SINNER

WHEN we last heard of St. John the Baptist he was at Bethabara beyond Jordan, preaching the coming of the kingdom, and pointing out Jesus to his disciples as the Lamb of God. When we next hear of him he is a prisoner in a dungeon.

It had come about in this way. Herod the king, son of the murderer of the Innocents, had married his brother Philip's wife, and St. John had dared to rebuke him for his wickedness. It is a dangerous thing to rebuke kings, and Herod in his anger, and stirred up and encouraged by his wife, had sent and shut up the fearless prophet in the Black Castle of Machaerus, a dark and gloomy fortress overlooking the waters of the Dead Sea.

You may have seen a captive eagle in a cage. It is one of the saddest of sights. And St. John behind the bars of his prison was just like a caged eagle. He had been accustomed all his life to the wild and savage life of the desert; to wander where he would beneath the stars, unfettered as a bird, free as the desert air. And now, at a stroke, his liberty was taken from him; he was snatched away from the open sky and the wide and boundless stretches of the desert, and plunged into the darkness of a narrow cell, to suffer an imprisonment almost worse than death.

No wonder, as the days passed by, the heart of the brave prophet grew very heavy, and the gloom of the dungeon seemed to enter into his very soul. What, he wondered, was Jesus doing? St. John's disciples had visited their master in prison, and he had listened eagerly to the news they brought of Jesus and the wonderful miracles He was working in Galilee. Why, oh why, had his Master left him to eat out his heart in this dreadful place, when he was longing to be out and at work, shaking out the folds of God's banner once more in the wilderness and gathering in fresh soldiers for the King? Why did not Jesus show His power by setting His standard-bearer free?

So heartsick and desperate did St. John at last become, that he summoned two of his disciples and sent them to Galilee to find Jesus and ask Him this plain question: 'Art thou He that should come, or do we look for another? If you are really the Christ, why do you not act like the Christ. If you are the King, why do you not begin your reign in earnest by overthrowing tyranny and righting the wrong?'

Jesus was surrounded by a crowd of sick people when St. John's disciples drew near, and instead of answering them at once He laid His hands on some of these sick folk and healed them. He then spoke to the disciples and bade them go and tell John what they had seen and heard; how 'the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them'—the very works the old prophet Isaiah had foretold should attend the Christ when He came.

This would show St. John that He was indeed the promised Deliverer. Only St. John must learn to trust Him; to have patience and not lose faith. Blessed were

they whose faith in Him stood firm, even though He might not show forth His power and glory in the way they expected Him to do.

After St. John's disciples were gone away, Jesus spoke to the crowd in glowing words about the Baptist. He told the people how strong and brave and self-denying he was. He was, He said, no feathery reed by the water-side, swayed hither and thither by any wind that blew; no ease-loving; pleasure-seeking man like those who hung about King Herod's court. He was a prophet, yes, and more than a prophet. He was none other than the forerunner of the Christ Himself; and never in the history of the world had there arisen a greater or nobler soul than he.

'And yet,' He added, 'he that is least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than St. John.' The poorest and humblest of Christ's disciples, that is to say, the feeble, white-haired old man, the poor peasant woman, the little innocent child—all who should hereafter be gathered into His Church, should be counted greater than the Baptist. They should be greater because Heavenly truths hidden from him should be revealed to them; and because of the great gift of the Holy Spirit, which should give them the power of climbing heights of holiness which even he had never climbed. And this mention of St. John led Jesus to complain of the way in which St. John's message and His own had been received by the Jews. The little Jewish boys and girls used often to play together at funerals and weddings in the streets and market-places of Galilee, and Jesus said that the people of His day were like a band of discontented children, who would not play at either funerals or weddings, and indeed found fault with whatever games their companions proposed.

The Jews, He said, disliked St. John, and called him mad because he was so stern and severe and lived apart from all the joys of life. And yet when He, the Christ, came, joining in the common life of man and trying to win them by love and tenderness, they turned against Him, and called Him hard names as well. The truth was they did not want to learn the way of God at all. All they took pleasure in was to find fault with those whom God had sent to teach them His way.

Not long after this, God sent a shining angel to unloose the bars of St. John's prison, and to set the caged eagle free.

It was Herod's birthday, and he had invited the lords and captains and great men of Galilee to a state banquet at the Castle. Lights shone and music sounded in the great banqueting-hall, the tables were spread with gold and silver dishes, and the guests, crowned with roses, ate and drank and made merry. Presently, in the midst of the feasting, the daughter of Herodias, a young girl, Salome by name, came in and danced before the king and his guests. It was held a shameful thing in Syria for any maiden to dance in public and before men, and Salome was a princess. Yet so beautiful was she, and with such grace did she dance, that the hall rang with applause, and Herod in his drunken delight swore that whatever she should ask should be hers, 'even unto the half of my kingdom.' What should she ask? She flew to ask advice of her mother.

Herodias had revenged herself upon St. John for opposing her marriage by having him shut up in prison, but she was not satisfied yet. Her hate for the man who had dared to affront her could only be appeased by his death.

Well, so here was her opportunity at last! 'Ask

for John Baptist's head,' she whispers eagerly; and the girl goes back to the banqueting-hall and says, 'My wish is that you give me here immediately, on a dish, the head of John the Baptist.'

As he hears the words, the king is filled with dismay. In his heart he knew that St. John was a brave, good man. He knew that St. John had been in the right and that he was in the wrong. Herod had shut up an innocent man in prison to please a queen; but to kill him—that was a different matter. How dared he do this? And yet, the promise! He had made it before all his guests, and he could not draw back. And so, because he was a coward, because he was afraid of what his friends would say or think, he gave the death order to a soldier.

St. John in his lonely prison cell had doubtless heard faint echoes of the music and the revelry that was going on above. Now he hears a step coming down the stairs. The door of his dungeon opens and the red flame of a brandished torch fills his dark cell with light. He sees the soldier with drawn sword in his hand, and he knows his last hour has come. Yet he is not afraid. Calmly he commends his soul to God and turns to face his death. Then the sword flashes and all is over. The angel comes shining down, and his prison door is unlocked at last.

Meanwhile the sounds of revelry have died down and the king and his guests are awaiting, in uneasy silence, the executioner's return.

By and by the curtain at the entrance of the hall is drawn back and the soldier stalks in—a grim figure—in his hands a golden dish, and upon it the dead man's head with its bloodless lips and dreadful staring eyes. In silence he places his ghastly burden in Salome's hands,

and she lifts it up in triumph and carries it off to her wicked mother.

How the sight of that head would haunt King Herod in his dreams! He never forgot it. There was no peace henceforth for the guilty monarch. Afterwards, when he heard of Jesus and His wonderful works, his troubled conscience even made him think, we are told, that St. John had arisen to life again, and he cried out and cowered with guilty fear.

You will say that this was a sad death for St. John to die, but ah! I think it was a glorious one. He had lived a brave, heroic life, and he died as he had lived. To human eyes it might have seemed that his life had been a failure. Only six months' work after all his years of preparation, and then the end! But God's eye sees differently to ours. Where we see failure He often sees success. It is not the length of the service that counts with Him, it is the faithfulness shown in doing the service. And St. John had been faithful. He had borne his witness to the King; he had done the work God had given him to do. And his work remained. Afterwards, when Jesus paid a visit to the place where St. John at first baptized, the people, we are told, recalled the words the herald had spoken of the King, 'and many believed on Him there.' St. John's work, you see, went on after his death. All true work always does. The sower comes and sows his seed and passes on his way, and his seed sinks into the furrow and is lost. But by and by it springs up, and if he does not gather the harvest himself, others gather it for him over his grave. So it was with St. John.

'Were a star quenched on high,
For ages would its light,

Still travelling downward from the sky,
Shine on our mortal sight.

‘So when a great man dies,
For years beyond our ken,
The light he leaves behind him lies
Upon the paths of men.’

While at Nain, or one of the neighbouring villages, Jesus was invited by a rich Pharisee, Simon by name, to dine at his house. The Pharisee seems to have asked Jesus, not out of friendliness so much as out of curiosity, to see what kind of man this new Teacher was, about whom so many wonderful stories were being told. He was a proud, haughty man, and thought he was showing Jesus great condescension in thus inviting him to sit down at his table.

Now among the Jews an invited guest was always treated with great courtesy and respect. On arriving at his host's house there was a slave-boy ready to unloose his sandals and pour cool water upon his dusty feet; and on crossing the threshold, the host himself would hasten to meet him and give him the kiss of welcome. He would then be conducted to one of the couches ranged around the table, and his host, or one of the servants, would anoint his head with fragrant oil.

None of these marks of respect, however, were paid to Jesus. He was made to feel that His host regarded Him as of little consequence, and that He was expected to be grateful for being invited at all.

While the dinner was being eaten, a woman came in through the open door, bearing in her hands an alabaster box of precious ointment. She was not a good woman; she had trailed the white robe of innocence God had given her in the dust; and her life, once fair and beautiful,

was now a stained and ruined thing over which the angels wept. It was Jesus' presence that had drawn her to the Pharisee's house. She had heard of His love and pity for the fallen and the lost; perhaps she had been among the crowd, a short time before, when He had spoken some beautiful words to those who were grieved and wearied with the burden of their sins—'Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.'

Rest, oh how she longed for rest! How tired she was of her guilty life; how her sin, which she had worn at first as lightly as a flower, had grown and grown until it had become a sore burden, too heavy for her to bear. Would Jesus take pity upon her and give her rest?

How wonderful He was. How different from the haughty Pharisee who drew aside his robe as she passed him in the street. She felt somehow that He would not turn her away.

And so she came and stood behind the couch upon which Jesus was reclining, and, as she stood there, her tears began to fall upon His feet, like the warm drops of a summer shower; and as they fell she wiped them off with her hair, and bending down began to kiss Jesus' feet and to anoint him with the precious ointment from her alabaster box.

The cold, severe eye of Simon had noticed all this, and he was filled with contempt. He could not understand how Jesus, if He were really a prophet, could allow Himself to be touched by such a woman. How was it that He did not know that she was a sinner?

Jesus read his thoughts, and answered them by telling

him the story of the money-lender and the debtors. 'There was a certain money-lender,' He said, 'who had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most?'

Simon, who wondered what was coming next, answered shortly, 'I suppose that he to whom he forgave most.' And Jesus said, 'Thou hast rightly judged.' Then, pointing to the woman at His feet, He went on sadly, 'Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest Me no water for My feet; but she hath washed My feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss My feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint, but this woman hath anointed My feet with ointment.

'Wherefore I say unto thee, her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much; but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little!'

And then to the woman He said, 'Thy sins are forgiven. . . . Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.' And at His words the burden of her sins was rolled away, the weary heart found rest, and she went out to win a place for herself among the saints. 'Mary Magdalene was down in the mud of the streets, but the Master passed by, and now she is robed in white and forever gleams and glitters, a jewel in the crown of the King of Kings.' Jesus continued His journey through the towns and villages of Galilee, and as He went He healed many sick folk of their diseases, and spoke His message of comfort and hope to many a sin-stained, sorrowing soul.

But though the common people heard Him gladly, the Scribes and Pharisees looked on with scowling faces and angry hearts.

Whatever Jesus did had come to be wrong in their eyes. Once when, 'by the finger of God,' He had healed a poor sufferer who was blind and dumb and devil-possessed, because they could not dispute the miracle, they even accused Jesus of working it by the power of the evil one himself.

It was then that Jesus spoke sterner words to them than He had ever spoken before. He told them that, by shutting their eyes to the light and hardening their hearts against the truth, they were running an awful risk. They were drifting into a state in which all good impulses and right feelings would die out of their hearts, and they would be unable to repent, and being unable to repent God would be unable to forgive them to all eternity.

Jesus' life at this time was a very busy and crowded one. Over and over again He would go hungry because His work left Him no time to eat, and the feet that carried Him about on His errands of love and mercy often grew very weary.

One day, vexed at the thought of the heavy strain He was enduring, His mother and His brethren came where He was teaching, in order to persuade Him to take a little rest and food. The crowd was so great, however, that they found it impossible to get near Him. At last the message was brought to Jesus that His mother and His brethren were standing on the outskirts of the crowd, desiring to speak with Him. But He answered, 'Who is My mother and who are My brethren?' Then with tender, loving look, stretching His hands towards His disciples, He said a beautiful

thing, and one which is full of comfort and encouragement to every one who is trying to serve God humbly and faithfully in the wear and tear of common every day life. 'Behold My mother and My brethren; for whosoever shall do the will of My Father which is in Heaven, the same is My brother and sister and mother.'

XI

THE SEVEN PICTURES OF THE KINGDOM—THE STORM ON THE LAKE—JESUS AND THE DEMONIAK OF GADARA

ONE day, early after His return to Capernaum, Jesus made His way down to the seashore. He was glad at times to leave the hot, crowded, narrow streets of the bustling town, and to sit for awhile by the sea. There would nearly always be a cool breeze blowing from the hills, and He loved the sight of the blue, spreading waters. There on the seashore, with the little wavelets gently breaking upon the hard, white sand at His feet, He would sit looking out over the sea, and watch the play of the sunlight on the rippling waters, with the white clouds sailing overhead, and forget for awhile his weariness.

But to-day as He went down to the beach, He did not go alone; He was followed by a great multitude of people, who had come out to see Him from all the villages and towns in the neighbourhood. So great was the crowd, and so eagerly did the people press upon Him, that He stepped into the boat the disciples kept moored close to the shore for His use, and made that His pulpit from which to speak to the people the word of life.

The Gospels give us a full account of Jesus' 'Sermon on the Sea,' as we might almost call it. It was a sermon made up of seven parables, all dealing with one subject, the Kingdom of Heaven, God's great colony, the Church, which He had come to found on earth; the colony whose



THE SOWER

laws He had already laid down, and the character of whose citizens He had already described in His 'Sermon on the Mount.'

The parables of Jesus were really like so many coloured pictures. When He wanted to describe the things of Heaven and of God, to people who were too ignorant or simple-minded to understand them without help, He would draw an earthly picture of the Heavenly thing—choosing as His picture something quite familiar to His hearers—and hold it up before them. Then those who were in earnest, and anxious to learn, would look *into* the picture and seek out the Heavenly meaning that lay hidden there, and as they looked, the meaning would unfold itself, and they would learn the lesson that Jesus meant to teach. Now in the seven parables which Jesus spoke, we have seven pictures of the Kingdom of Heaven, looked at from every side—in its foundation, its growth, its secret influence, its value, and its end.

The first picture He drew was a beautiful and yet a sad one too. It shows us a Sower going out to sow his seed—Jesus Christ Himself leaving the beautiful fields of Heaven and coming down to this sad earth of ours to sow the seed of Eternal life in men's hearts. But as He sows, some of the seed falls by the hard wayside, and the birds swoop down upon it and carry it off; and some falls on rocky places, but thinly covered with the good red earth, and it springs up at once, but as quickly withers away beneath the scorching heat of the sun. And some falls on a thorn-patch where the thorns had been cut down but not rooted up, and it too springs up; only the thorns spring up as well, and the stronger plants strangle the weaker, and no fruit is brought to perfection. Only a fourth part of the ground is fruitful, only a fourth part of men's hearts are honest and good, and understand the

word of life, and bring forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.

And next, the parable of the tares tells a still sadder tale. We are shown a picture of the good field of the Church, well tended and cared for, and the yellow wheat seed carefully sown; and then, in the dead of night, with stealthy tread and furtive glance, the dark form of an enemy, moving among the furrows and sowing the poisonous black tare seed among the wheat—false teaching, false practice, everything false. And then when the wheat blades show green above the ground the tares appear with them. And there is nothing to be done; the poisonous plants cannot be rooted out, the bad people cannot be separated from the good. Good and bad alike must just grow together till the harvest. Not till the Day of Judgment, when the angel reapers are sent forth to reap the field, can the separation be made.

Such then, Jesus teaches, should be the opening history of the Church—only one-fourth part of the good seed sown in men's hearts taking effect, and then the tares springing up and helping to spoil even that.

But to show that in spite of the hindrances and difficulties in the way of God's Kingdom, it should in the end prevail, comes the parable of the grain of mustard seed, which indeed is the least of all seeds, but when it is grown it is the greatest among herbs, and becomes a tree, so that the fowls of the air come and lodge in the branches of it. What a little thing is a seed! a child's hand can crush it, a breath can blow it away; and yet wrapped up in that tiny seed lies a mighty tree, with spreading branches, whose roots shall strike down so deep into the earth that the fiercest tempest shall be powerless to move it. Such a seed should be the Church of Jesus. It would have a very small beginning, but it should have a mighty ending.

And so it has come to pass. The mustard seed, that tiny, despised band of twelve disciples, poor fishermen, with no wealth or learning or influence, has grown into a great tree, under whose branches many nations have been gathered. It is still growing; one day, we believe, it will overshadow the whole wide world.

Then comes the parable of the leaven, which shows us a woman at a kneading-trough, putting leaven or yeast into a lump of dough, until by and by, as the leaven spreads, the whole lump is leavened.

That again Jesus meant to be a picture of the progress of the Kingdom, looked at not so much from without, in its open effects, as from within, in its secret influence. It shows us how the leaven of the Kingdom—the influence of Jesus' words and that of the Holy Spirit—works within us, gradually weaning the heart from the love of worldly things, and teaching it to love the things of Heaven; and how by growing into true servants of God ourselves, by the beauty and example of our lives, we influence others to become His servants too.

The next two parables have to do with the glorious prize that is set before the children of the Kingdom, and tells us what we must do to gain it. First of all we are shown a man ploughing a field. Suddenly his plough-share strikes against something hard. He looks down, and there, at his feet, lies a great box crammed full of buried treasure, gold and silver and precious stones. His fortune is made. Hastily covering up the glittering heap for fear other eyes may see it, with beating heart he hurries home and sells all that he has, and buys the field of treasure for himself.

Next we are shown a merchantman, knapsack on back, travelling about in search of pearls. One day he comes across the most wonderful pearl he has ever seen—

the whitest, the roundest, the most perfect—a gem fit to shine in the crown of the mightiest king. Henceforth his quest is at an end. There is only one pearl for him now in all the world, and to buy it, like the ploughman, he parts with all his possessions.

The treasure and the pearl are both pictures of the Church's King, Jesus Christ Himself, 'the Prize of our high calling.' To some, like the ploughman, the great Prize is made known suddenly; they find it, as he found the treasure in the field. They have been long living, perhaps, a careless, indifferent life, not troubling much about religion, when suddenly something happens to open their eyes—some chance word, some solemn event, some accident; and there before them shines the treasure in all its golden splendour and Heavenly beauty, and to gain it they give up everything.

To some the Prize comes in the same fashion as the pearl came to the merchantman. All their life they have been seeking pearls, shining pearls of peace and happiness and rest of mind and heart, but somehow the perfect pearl is hard to find. They persevere, however, and at last, after long searching they find it, and find it in what perhaps they despised long ago, the Cross of Jesus Christ.

And when the Treasure, the Pearl, is found, everything else goes for nothing. St. Augustine, once a young man of wild and evil life, and afterwards a saint and bishop of the Church, tells us how true this was in his own case; how easy he found it, in his joy at finding the Treasure, Christ, to give up all that he had long dreaded to part with—all his sinful pleasures, his evil habits, and all that belonged to his old bad self. St. Paul, the eager seeker after pearls, tells us much the same story too, 'Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss,' he writes, 'for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for

whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him.'

Last of all, with a very solemn lesson to those who listened to it from the lips of Jesus, as well as to us who read it to-day, comes the parable of the drag-net, 'which when it was full they drew to shore, and sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away.' The net is a picture of the Church, let down by the hand of Jesus into the shadowy waters of the world. Ever since the Day of Pentecost it has been gathering into its meshes of every kind, young and old, rich and poor, good and bad, and still, with ever widening sweep, it searches the waters through and through. But when the night of time is past, and the morning of eternity begins to break upon the everlasting hills, the net shall be drawn to shore, and then the good fish shall be separated from the bad, Christ's true servants from His pretended followers.

And the evil and slothful, the useless and tainted, all those unfit for the Heavenly life, shall be shut out from the kingdom for ever; while the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father.

After He had spoken this last parable, Jesus sent the crowd away to think over what He had said, and to try to get at the meaning of the beautiful pictures He had painted.

The evening was now drawing on, and the rays of the westering sun had begun to dye the lovely waters of the lake with more lovely colours still, and to turn to gold the white sands, where the fishermen were busy mending their nets. Jesus, seeing fresh crowds gathering upon the beach and wishing to avoid them, bade His disciples hoist sail and make for the other side of the lake; and presently

the boat in which He stood was moving over the water in the direction of the little town of Gadara.

Jesus was tired out with His day's work, and as the disciples were busy working the ropes and adjusting the sail to catch the breeze, He went to the hinder part of the vessel and lay down to sleep with His head on the steersman's leather cushion. Suddenly, while they were in the midst of the sea, one of those violent storms which, without any warning, sometimes sweep down upon the lake, burst over their head, and in a moment the little fishing boat was fighting for its life in the midst of a tumbling, flying mass of water.

The disciples were brave and hardy fishermen, used to rough weather. They knew—none better—how to handle a boat in a storm, but this was a fiercer storm than even they cared to face. As the wind blew more and more violently and the angry sea rose higher and higher, they became thoroughly frightened, expecting every moment that the boat would sink. At last, in their terror and alarm, they turn for help to their Master, but to their astonishment they find Him still asleep, resting peacefully, as a tired-out child might rest, quite undisturbed by the rocking and tossing of the ship and the noise of the waves. 'Master, Master, we perish,' they cry, and at the sound of their voice Jesus awakes.

Does it not seem strange that He should have slept through the howling of the wind, and the creaking of the cordage, and the thud of the water dashing against the vessel's sides, to be awakened at last by the sound of voices. Why was this? Dear child, I think the voices of the disciples reached Jesus' ears because the disciples themselves were so near to Jesus' heart. I have heard of a mother who slept through a great storm just in the same way, but was suddenly awakened by the cry of her

little child. It was love that keened her ear to hear the baby voice, just as it was love and tenderness that keened the ear of Jesus to hear the cry of His disciples in their bitter need.

Rising to His feet Jesus' eye takes in all the wildness of the scene around Him—the leaping waves, the sinking boat, the frightened faces of the disciples. 'Why are ye so fearful?' He asks. 'How is it that ye have no faith?' Then stretching out His hand over the angry sea, He speaks to it as a tamer might speak to some savage animal, 'Peace, be still' ('be muzzled,' the words really mean), and at His word the wind drops and the white waves crouch at His feet. Far and wide spreads the great calm; the clouds roll away; the stars come out; in a sapphire sky the moon hangs a white globe, and trails a path of glory over the waters.

Then the disciples looked one on another in amazement, saying, 'What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?' They felt as Jacob felt when he awakened out of his dream and said, 'Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not.' Jesus had shown that He had the strength of God. 'O Lord God of Hosts, who is like unto Thee? Thou rulest the raging of the sea; Thou stillest the waves thereof when they arise.'

Delayed by the storm, by the time Jesus and His disciples had reached the opposite shore night had fallen, and the moonlight was shining upon the desolate coast with its background of barren rocks and gloomy caverns.

As the disciples grounded the boat on the beach, a wild figure came leaping towards them out of one of the burial caves among the rocks. It was a demoniac. As the moonlight fell upon his naked body, it could be seen that he was covered with dreadful wounds. His matted hair

hung loose upon his shoulders, while pieces of broken chain dangled from his wrists and ankles.

The sport of the evil spirits, he had wandered away from home and friends, and made a dreadful lodging for himself among the tombs by the seashore, where he had become the terror of the countryside. For he was very strong as well as fierce, and men were afraid of him. To prevent him doing mischief he had been chained, but his strength was so great that he had broken the strongest chains in pieces; and always, night and day, he was in the mountains, crying and cutting himself with sharp stones.

On seeing Jesus, this poor, devil-haunted man fell at His feet, confessing Him to be the Son of God, and beseeching Him not to torment him. Jesus, with a look of pity at the wild form crouching before Him, asked him his name, when the strange answer came, 'My name is Legion, for we are many,' by which the man meant, perhaps, that the evil spirits who haunted him were a great host. With this the evil spirits, using the man as their mouthpiece, began to beseech Jesus not to banish them to the place of darkness whence they had come out. See! there was a huge herd of swine feeding on the cliff overhanging the sea. Might they not enter into them? Then Jesus grants their request, and, leaving the demoniac, the evil spirits enter into the swine, and immediately the whole herd, as though seized by a panic, rush down the steep cliff, plunge into the dark waters, and are drowned.

There was a band of swineherds tending the swine. When these men saw what had happened, late as it was, they fled away in terror to carry the news to Gadara. And at sunrise the people came flocking out to the scene of the miracle. There a wonderful sight met their gaze. Sitting

at the feet of Jesus was the man who had the Legion, but how changed! No longer was he naked, fierce, and raving. He sat there clothed, perhaps in a cloak which Jesus' own hands had tenderly placed around him, and gazing at them with gentle aspect and quiet, untroubled eyes.

It was a sight which might have touched their hearts; and yet these half-heathen people—for so they were—could think of nothing but their lost swine. They stared doubtfully at Jesus, and instead of inviting Him to enter their city they begged Him to go away. They did not know what damage He might be doing next.

And Jesus went away. He would not stay where He was not wanted; and so the people of Gadara lost the blessings His presence in their city might have brought. No sick were healed at Gadara, no blind eyes were opened, no lepers cleansed, no message of comfort and hope came to lighten the lives of the sorrowful, or lead the sinful back to God. Jesus saw that these people cared only for money and gain, and so He turned from them. They never saw His face again.

Meanwhile the man that had the Legion prayed earnestly that he might go back with Jesus to Capernaum as His disciple or servant. But Jesus had other work for him to do. He was to serve Him by going back to his home, and telling his friends and relations what great things the Lord had done for him. And the man did as Jesus commanded him. He returned home, and from his home he went into all the country round, spreading the story of Jesus' greatness and His love.

O happy man, that had the Legion! yesterday the prey of unclean spirits, ruined, degraded, lost; to-day set free by the power of God, lifted out of his misery, and made a standard-bearer in the army of the King.

XII

THE LITTLE MAID WHOM JESUS RAISED FROM THE DEAD
—THE KING'S AMBASSADORS—THE MIRACLE OF THE
FIVE LOAVES—HOW JESUS WALKED UPON THE WAVES

DESCENDING the rocky cliffs of Gadara, Jesus and His disciples entered the little fishing-skiff that lay moored to the shore, and, hoisting sail, turned the boat's head once more for Capernaum.

As they drew near the landing-stage, they saw a great crowd upon the beach anxiously awaiting their arrival. Among them stood a man whose rich dress and stately presence marked him out as one of the chief men of the city. This was Jairus, the wealthy ruler of the synagogue. He was in great trouble; his only little daughter, whom he dearly loved, was ill and like to die, and he had left his house in haste to seek for Jesus, and to implore Him to come and heal her.

Pitying glances are cast by the whispering crowd at the rich man, as he stands there with his proud head bent and his face working with silent grief, but he does not heed them. He can only think of his little child, with her bright eyes and fevered face, tossing on her sick-bed at home, and the awful fear keeps gnawing at his heart: 'What if she dies before the Master comes?'

At last the boat grounds upon the beach, and almost before the disciples have had time to land, Jairus has burst through the crowd and flung himself at Jesus'

feet with the cry, 'My little daughter is at the point of death, but come and lay Thy hand upon her and she shall live.'

Jesus does not answer this pitiful cry for help by any word of good cheer; He just stretches out His hand and helps the ruler to his feet; but there is a look in His eyes so kindly and so compassionate that it fills the poor father with courage, and sets his heart beating with hope. The next moment the Good Physician is on His way to Jairus' house. As He passes along the narrow Capernaum streets, followed by His disciples and the eager crowd, a poor sick woman catches sight of His face. She has never seen so wonderful a face before; it seems touched by a light from Heaven, so full it is of power and majesty and love. In a moment her mind is made up. She does not dare approach Jesus openly, but she comes behind Him in the press, and touches the white tassel with its thread of blue that hangs down from one of the corners of His cloak. Such a timid, trembling touch it was; it fell upon Jesus' dress like a snowflake. But it was the touch of faith, and He felt the thrill of it. In a flash the health and strength she had lost so long came back to her; and when Jesus turned round to see who it was that touched Him, and she came forward and confessed what she had done, she heard Him say, 'Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace.'

The house of Jairus was not far off, but before the door was reached there came messengers with the sad news that the little maid was dead. There was no need to trouble the Good Physician any further. He had come too late. Too late! cannot we imagine the look of agony on the face the father turns to Jesus? But Jesus only gazes at him with steadfast, loving eyes. 'Be not afraid,' He says, 'only believe'; and somehow, in spite of the news he has

just heard, at Jesus' words a little flame of hope and faith leaps up once more in Jairus' heart, just as, when some wind stirs the embers, a little scarlet flame will sometimes leap from a dying fire.

Taking with him St. Peter, St. James, and St. John, Jesus entered the house of mourning. There were signs of death everywhere. Already the hired mourners had been sent for, and had begun to ply their melancholy trade, playing on flutes, and beating their breasts, and filling the house with cries of lamentation. Such mock sorrow and pretended grief were hateful to Jesus. 'Why make ye this ado, and weep?' He asks; 'the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth.' But His words are only received with scorn and mocking laughter. They thought Him mad; they did not know that in God's eyes to die is really only to fall asleep, and that Jesus could as easily awaken the dead to life as raise a sleeper from his pillow.

Then Jesus sent them forth from the house, and taking the father and mother of the little girl and His three disciples, He passed into the quiet of the death-chamber. There, stretched upon her little pallet, the dead child lay, like some white lily with a broken stem; her hands were folded meekly on her breast, her eyes were closed as if in slumber; upon her parted lips lay the smile the dead so often wear.

Bending down Jesus takes one of the little hands in His, and then, His words sounding like a tender echo of the mother's morning cry as she awakened her darling from her sleep, 'Wake up, little one,' He says.

And as He speaks the child heaves a deep sigh, a faint colour steals back into her pale cheeks, and she opens her eyes—to find herself back in her little room, to meet the tender smile of Jesus, and the next moment to be clasped in her mother's loving arms.



THE RAISING OF JAIRUS' DAUGHTER

How like a dream this awakening of the little maid must have seemed to those who stood by ; but it was no dream, as they were reminded by the next words Jesus spoke, bidding them give her something to eat. Once again, as at pleasant Nain, Jesus had proved Himself the Lord of Life. He had been called to Jairus' house to heal a sick child, and He had turned the shadow of death into the morning.

As Jesus left the ruler's house, two blind men met Him on the way and followed Him home, beseeching Him to have compassion upon them. Jesus asked them whether they believed that He had power to give them back their sight, and on their answering eagerly, 'Yea, Lord,' He touched their eyes and immediately they were healed. Later on in the evening a wretched, tongue-tied demoniac was brought to Him, and Jesus, with one word of power, drove out the tormenting devil from the man, and unlocked his poor dumb lips.

We saw that when Jesus chose His twelve apostles, He chose them to aid Him in His great task of setting up God's Kingdom upon earth. All this time He had been training them for the work that lay before them ; He had been touching their hearts with something of His own eagerness and enthusiasm in the service of the kingdom. Now the time had come to put them to the test. Oh, how the sin and sorrow of the world weighed on Jesus' loving heart ! How He longed to lift the burden of the sin away and lighten the sorrow ! He was always thinking of the poor, wandering, weary souls around Him, so badly in want of God, and yet knowing so little about Him. It was the thought of their misery and blindness that helped to make His own life so sad. They seemed to Him just like sheep straying in the darkness upon some desolate, wolf-haunted moor, without a shepherd, shelterless and

lost. He could not rest until they were gathered safely into the fold of God.

Calling the twelve together, Jesus sends them out on a great preaching mission throughout Galilee. He directs them how they are to go—not singly, but two and two, as comrades in the work, each leaning on a brother's arm. He bids them go, looking with simple trust to God to supply their wants, taking no provision basket with them, no gold nor silver in their purse, nor change of clothing nor travelling sandals for the way. He speaks to them of the many dangers that lay before them, and of the protecting hand of God that was able to keep them safe—a hand stretched out to shield even the little brown sparrow that makes its nest in the eaves. He tells them that in His service they must be ready to give and hazard all, but He tells them at the same time that the post of hardship and peril should be the post of honour. As the King's ambassadors they should take rank with the King Himself. Even a cup of cold water given to one of the humblest among them, for His sake, should not fail of its reward.

It was while the apostles were absent on the King's service that the murder of St. John the Baptist took place. Afterwards, when they had gone through Galilee, preaching the good news of the Kingdom and healing the sick, they returned to Jesus and began to tell Him of all that had befallen them and to give an account of their work.

Jesus had much to say to them in return, but He wanted a quiet place to say it in. He knew besides how heavy the labours of His disciples had been and how much they needed rest, and so He determined to leave the busy streets of Capernaum for awhile, and to go to some green secluded spot among the distant hills, where they

might be alone and undisturbed. And so He bade St. Peter make ready the little fishing-boat, and presently the oars are flashing and the boat begins to steal across the smooth waters of the lake in the direction of the town of Bethsaida Julias. Landing a little below the town, Jesus and His disciples took their way inland until they reached the spot they sought, a narrow green plain hemmed in by a circle of surrounding hills.

But that day at least they were not to find the quiet and the rest of which they were in need. A great multitude of Capernaum folks, seeing the disciples launch their boat, and marking the course it was taking, followed for miles along the seashore, and, crossing the waters of the Jordan just where they entered the lake, came up with Jesus in the place which He had chosen as his resting-place. It was Passover-time, and the crowd of wistful, anxious faces every moment grew larger; for, hearing that the great Prophet of Nazareth was near at hand, many of the pilgrims to Jerusalem began to turn aside from the main road and to gather around Jesus as well.

The patient Christ had not the heart to turn these poor shepherdless sheep away. Tired and fasting as He was, He went among them, and laying His hands on the sick He healed them all. Then standing in their midst He began to speak to them the words they were hungering so to hear. The hours passed by and still He spoke and still the people listened, sad faces brightening and sad hearts growing glad as He told them of the Great Father's love for His wandering children, and of the beautiful land of Heaven with its green pastures and still waters where no one was ever weary or hungry or in pain.

By the time Jesus had finished speaking the sun was low in the western sky, and the hills began to cast their great violet shadows across the plain. It was getting

late and the disciples were growing uneasy. What was to be done with the crowd that still lingered around the Master? Among the rough-bearded men there were many women and little children, and they were all hungry and footsore and far from home, and darkness was closing in. Would it not be best to get rid of them without delay?

‘Lord, send them away,’ they urge, ‘that they may go to the towns and villages and buy themselves bread.’ But Jesus makes this strange reply, ‘They need not go away—give ye them to eat.’ How amazed the disciples must have been when they heard these words. Where could they obtain food to feed so many thousands?

Jesus turns to Philip, and to test his faith asks him this very question, ‘Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat?’ Alas! Philip’s faith is but weak, like that of the rest. He hesitates; it might be possible to buy the bread in some neighbouring village, he thinks—but how to pay for it? ‘It would cost,’ he answers slowly, ‘at least two hundred silver pennies (more than seven pounds) to give every one in the crowd a little mouthful.’ Jesus turns again to the disciples. ‘How many loaves have ye?’ He asks. ‘Go and see.’

There was a little lad among the crowd who was carrying a basket of provisions slung upon his back. Perhaps he was standing near Jesus at the time and overheard His words. If so, we can fancy him timidly plucking at St. Andrew’s robe as he went by to do Jesus’ bidding, and pointing eagerly to his own little store of food. Would this be of any use? Half doubtfully St. Andrew leads him to Jesus, and the little lad, his eyes shining with love, spreads his offering out before the Master. It was not a very grand offering, only five



THE MIRACLE OF THE LOAVES

THE MIRACLE OF THE FIVE LOAVES 205

small, round cakes of barley bread and two little dried fishes, but it was all he had to give, and Jesus was pleased to accept the gift and to turn it to wonderful account.

‘Make the men sit down,’ He said, and in a few minutes the great company—five thousand men, besides women and children—was seated on the green grass in long ranks, their gay dresses of blue and red and saffron turning the plain into a very garden of flowers.

Then Jesus took the loaves and fishes in His hands, and, raising His eyes to Heaven in prayer, He blessed them, and, breaking them into pieces, He gave them into the hands of His disciples to distribute among the multitude. And up and down the long lines went the disciples, giving the food into the eager, stretched-out hands of the hungry thousands; and lo! as the loaves and fishes passed from hand to hand, instead of wasting they increased. The more was given away the more remained, until after all had eaten and been satisfied, the disciples, at Jesus’ command, gathered twelve large wicker baskets with the broken fragments that were strewn upon the grass—

‘For when the Master blessed and brake
The loaves grew large and fair,
The food was sweet for His dear sake
To those who feasted there.
And as among the crowd the boy
Beheld his gifts increase,
He had a new and deeper joy
In Christ’s own smile of peace.

‘And still Christ takes the children’s store
Of loving thought and deed,
And uses them for evermore
To help the great world’s need;
And whoso makes one mourner glad
Or speaks one healing word,
Shall gather like the little lad
A wonderful reward.’

There was a belief among the Jews that when the Christ should come He would feed the hungry with good things in the wilderness, just as Moses had fed them in time of old with the manna. After the crowd had been fed, therefore, the whisper began to pass from lip to lip, 'Has the King come at last? Can it be that this is indeed the Christ?'

Every moment the excitement grows. It seems that the multitude are all for marching to Jerusalem with Jesus at their head, and setting Him on the throne of David. But the path Jesus had come to tread was not the path of earthly glory; it was the Way of Sorrows, and it wound uphill, not to a throne, but to the hard and bitter Cross. Facing the eager crowd He speaks a few quiet words, and the tumult dies down. Then bidding His disciples return to the seashore and take boat for Capernaum, He begins to send the people away to their homes.

By this time it was quite dark. Presently the great white Paschal moon began to lift its silver edge above the hills, and Jesus, guided by its light, climbed to the topmost peak of one of the mountains overlooking the lake. There upon the dewy grass, under the open sky, solitary and alone, save for the angel forms that bent above Him, He knelt in prayer. The hours passed by and left Him kneeling still, until the far-off lights of Capernaum, that twinkled along the shore, began one by one to disappear, and only the light of the stars remained.

Meanwhile the disciples had waited long for the Master, but finding He did not come they at last unwillingly set out without Him. There was no hint in sea or sky of coming danger as they loosed their boat from the shore; the sea, 'God's sapphire,' was smooth and fair, and the silent sky was bright with stars. But when they had rowed between two and three miles

out to sea the wind began to rise; great gusts came sweeping down upon the lake from the deep mountain gullies, and, toil at the oars as they might, they could not beat a way for themselves through the boisterous waves that dashed against the boat.

Hours passed by and still the storm raged on, and this time there was no Jesus with them to smoothe the rough billows and say to the wind, 'Peace, be still!'

At last, when things seemed at their very worst, the help they so sorely needed came to the disciples. Jesus on the mountain-top had been looking out over the stormy deep. Kneeling there He could hear the howling of the wind and the roar of the angry billows beating against the cliffs. He could see afar off the little boat tossing among the waves, and the oars slowly rising and falling, and His heart grew very pitiful towards those poor, tempest-driven souls in their weariness and loneliness and despair. And so, just before daybreak, when the night was darkest, He came down and 'entered into the springs of the sea.'

And how did He come? It was quite dark on the water, and the disciples were still wearily tugging at the oars, when suddenly through the driving clouds the moon leaped out, and there upon the wild waters they saw a shining form coming towards them out of the night. It was Jesus, and as He drew nearer they could see the sullen waves sinking beneath His tread, and the water under His feet calming itself into a pavement of transparent glass, clear as crystal, 'having the glory of God.'

They did not know Him at first. Huddled together in the boat they cried out in terror, thinking it was a spirit. But even as they cried out, an answering voice—a voice they knew so well and had learned to love so dearly—rang out clearly above the noise of the tempest,

'Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid,' and they knew that it was Jesus.

From his place in the boat Simon Peter gazes eagerly across the troubled waters. So great is his joy at hearing his Master's voice, so intense his longing to be close beside Him once more, he has not patience to wait for Jesus to enter the boat. 'Lord, since it is Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water,' he cries; and Jesus answers 'Come,' and in a trice St. Peter is clambering over the vessel's side and has entered the sea.

For one wonderful moment, borne up by his faith in Jesus, he walks upon the waves as though upheld by the invisible hand of an angel; but it is only for a moment. There comes a furious gust of wind, he feels the blinding spray in his face, and his heart fails him for fear, as a great wall of toppling water rises before him and quite shuts out the shining figure of Jesus from his sight. The same instant he is fighting for his life in the clutch of the pitiless waves, in danger of being sucked down into the depths of the sea.

'Lord, save me, I perish.' St. Peter had only just time to gasp out these words, but they saved his life. Almost before they had passed his lips, Jesus was by his side and was holding him up. 'O thou of little faith,' He says, in tones of loving reproach, 'wherefore didst thou doubt?' Poor Simon Peter was too breathless to answer; he could only cling the more tightly to Jesus' outstretched hand. Now that he had hold of that, he felt quite safe. He knew what a strong hand it was; its tender, loving pressure gave him back the courage he had lost; he felt he could never, never lose faith in Jesus again.

Then Jesus and St. Peter entered the fishing-boat together, and as soon as Jesus was come on board the

wind died down and the waves sank to rest. Another moment, and the boat had glided through the rippling waters into the quiet haven where Jesus would have it be, and the disciples were kneeling at His feet, giving Him thanks and hailing Him with humble, adoring hearts as the Son of God.

XIII

CHRIST THE BREAD OF LIFE—THE HEATHEN WOMAN WHO
DESIRED TO BE FED WITH THE CRUMBS WHICH FELL
FROM JESUS' TABLE—THE DEAF MAN WITH THE
STAMMERING TONGUE IN DECAPOLIS—THE SEVEN
LOAVES WHICH FED FOUR THOUSAND

OF the great multitude sent away by Jesus, after He had so wonderfully satisfied their hunger with the five barley loaves and two small fishes, some returned to their homes; others, the Passover pilgrims, continued their journey towards Jerusalem.

There were many, however, who, after the rest had gone, still lingered on the outskirts of the plain; and these spent the night in the open air, sleeping upon the grass, wrapped in their warm woollen cloaks. When morning dawned once more, little groups of these men began to collect together, and to inquire eagerly among themselves as to what had become of the Prophet Jesus. They had watched Him climb the hill in the gathering twilight; they knew the disciples had put out to sea without Him, and so they felt sure that He must be somewhere near at hand. But, search as they might, Jesus was nowhere to be found. At last, in their perplexity, they went down to the beach, and entering into some of the many boats, that, like a flock of weary sea-birds, had been driven ashore to seek shelter from the gale of the night before, they set sail for Capernaum.

It was one of the days of public worship, and when they came to Capernaum they found Jesus teaching in the great white marble synagogue. As they crowded into the building they began to question Him as to how He had come there, but He made no answer to their eager inquiries. He knew why they were so anxious to find Him; it was because they were still bent on making Him a king. With a king upon the throne of David they thought there would be riches and plenty for every one; fine houses and soft clothing, and well-filled money-bags for the asking. Best of all, the hated Roman would be driven away, and their country would once more regain its ancient glory.

If He could only make them see how little the earthly splendour and plenty were worth in comparison with the Heavenly treasure; if they would only be persuaded to labour, not for the things which pass away and perish in the using, but for the things which really satisfy and which last for ever!

Sitting before them in the crowded synagogue Jesus began to speak to them of the Bread of God, the wonderful food which God had sent from Heaven to feed a hungry world. They thought at first He was speaking of some wonderful bread such as they had lately tasted in the wilderness, but Jesus was really speaking about Himself. 'I am the Bread of Life,' He said. 'He that cometh to Me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst.'

How grandly these words of Jesus must have rung out that morning in the Capernaum synagogue; and yet on many ears they fell with a strange unwelcome sound. The people began to murmur. How could Jesus, whose earthly history they knew so well, have come down from Heaven? And when He went on to speak of the Bread

which He should give being His flesh, which He should give for the life of the world, they grew more perplexed and angry still. 'How can this man give us His flesh to eat?' they asked impatiently. Even some of Jesus' own followers asked the same question, and because the answer was hard to find they went away and walked no more with Him. Ah! if they had only had a little patience; if they had only been content to take Jesus' words on trust for a little while, until the time came for Him to explain them. We look on a little, and we see the picture of a little upper room in Jerusalem, through whose narrow windows the silver light of the Paschal moon is softly shining.

There in the midst among His disciples, His face bright with the glory of unspeakable love, is Jesus. The room is full of angels, only we cannot see them. As we look, Jesus takes bread and blesses it, and breaks it and gives it to the apostles, saying, 'Take, eat; this is My Body which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me.' It is the first institution of the Holy Communion. Then as the picture fades away we see the disciples kneeling at their Master's feet, their eager hands outstretched to take the precious Gift. There is no shadow of doubt or perplexity upon their faces now, only the light of a great awe and gladness. The dark saying spoken of old at Capernaum has become clear at last.

Jesus was grieved and disappointed to find that directly He began to speak of high, mysterious things His disciples began to draw away from Him. Was there no one who had faith enough to trust Him? Was this but the beginning of the end, when all should forsake the Man of Sorrows and leave Him to tread the thorny path to death unbefriended and alone? Turning to His disciples, 'Will ye also go

away?' He sadly asks. Like some sharp sword-thrust His words pierced to their very hearts. Leave their Master? Why, for whom should they leave Him? What friend had they in all the world like Jesus? Whose voice had power to speak peace to their troubled souls like His? And Simon Peter answered and said, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.'

About this time the Pharisees attacked Jesus because He did not insist upon His disciples observing the proper form of washing the hands. Jesus answered that to eat with unwashed hands did not defile a man, it was the evil thoughts that he encouraged in his heart that defiled him, it was the evil words he spoke and the evil deeds of which he was guilty. The Pharisees themselves were the real law-breakers, He said, for by their rules about things which did not matter, they were breaking the rule of God's commandments and bringing His religion into contempt. What did clean hands signify, if the heart within were full of hypocrisy and uncleanness?

Again Jesus left Galilee and made His way towards the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. These were the two chief cities of Phœnicia, a strip of country stretching along the seacoast to the north of Palestine, and famous as one of the great trading centres of the world. The stately ships of Tyre sailed every sea, even as far as distant Britain, bringing back rich cargoes of wheat and honey, ivory and spices, gold and precious stones; the streets of Sidon were thronged with traders in 'blue robes and broidered work'; her merchandise poured in from every country; her weavers and embroiderers, her workers in glass and artists in gold and coloured gems were famous everywhere. But Jesus did not enter into either of these great

cities. He did not wish to attract attention or to be followed about by curious crowds; He wished to remain quite unknown. But He could not be hid. 'People,' it has been said, 'are sure to find out any one who is worth finding out'; and another writes, 'You may hide sweet flowers so that they cannot be seen, but the fragrance they shed will soon disclose their hiding-place.' So it was with Jesus.

There was a poor woman of Canaan, one of the descendants of those old savage tribes which had been driven out of Palestine by Joshua, who came where He was. She had a daughter who was possessed by a devil, and she came to Jesus in order to ask His help. She was a heathen, this poor mother, and had been brought up to worship strange gods—Astarte, moon goddess of the Phœnicians, and savage Baal, whose altars smoked with the blood of human sacrifices. But, living on the borders of Palestine, she had doubtless heard of the One True God, and the name of Jesus, the famous Prophet and Healer of Galilee, was familiar to her; for already, we are told, His fame had gone throughout all Syria. The Jews, she knew, despised the Gentiles, and she was a Gentile and a heathen as well, but who could tell? The Prophet might be merciful and kind; there was a chance at any rate that He might listen to her prayer. And so she came to Jesus and besought Him with tears, to cast out the devil from her daughter.

And how did Jesus treat her—this loving Saviour who had a kind word for every one in trouble and turned none away?

He answered her not a word. How the poor aching heart of the mother must have sunk; yet she did not give up hope. She did just what we must do when we pray and God seems to turn a deaf ear to our prayers.

She kept on asking; her prayer became more and more earnest the more unwilling Jesus seemed to listen.

At last, annoyed at her sad, continual crying, the disciples besought Jesus to send her away. 'She is crying after us,' they said impatiently. And Jesus answers them in tones loud enough perhaps for the woman to hear, 'I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' At this the poor despairing mother fell at His feet with the cry, 'Lord, help me.' She thought of her poor daughter lying on her bed in the power of the evil spirit; she seemed to hear her moans and to see the sad, appealing look in her eyes, and she felt as if her mother's heart must break. Oh, if Jesus knew all—all the misery and sadness of her child, surely He would have some pity. But Jesus only answers, 'It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to the dogs.'

That is the only comfort she gets, the only kindness and compassion she is treated with. Surely she will give up her hopeless struggle after this and go back with sad and bitter heart, to try what her old idols of Syria will do for her, since this new Teacher is so stern and pitiless.

But no! she is not conquered yet. Did she catch, we wonder, a look in Jesus' eyes which gave her courage, although His words sounded so harsh and forbidding? We cannot tell; at any rate, she prays more earnestly than ever. 'Yes, Lord, yet the little dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs. You call me a dog; well then, Master, treat me like one. The dogs under the table are fed with the broken fragments which the children leave when the meal is over. Let some crumbs of your mercy and compassion be thrown to me. I ask nothing more.' And she conquered at last! Jesus only seemed to refuse her prayer in order to put her to the

test, to try the kind of stuff her faith was made of. He dealt with her, in other words, just as God often deals with us. All the while He seemed to be thrusting her back He was really drawing her closer to His loving heart. And now that same voice, that but a moment ago spoke so roughly and unkindly as it seemed, addresses her in gentle, cheering, compassionate tones, 'O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt.' So the story runs in St. Matthew, or as it is given in St. Mark, 'For this saying, go thy way; the devil is gone out of thy daughter.' And the mother goes her way, and finds it even as Jesus had said. She had been tried in the fire and had come out pure gold. Like Jacob in the Old Testament story when he was wrestling with the angel, she had clung to Jesus, and cried, 'I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me.' Like Jacob, she had power with God and prevailed.

Jesus did not remain long in the neighbourhood of Tyre and Sidon. Accompanied by His little band of followers, He set out eastwards, and, threading His way through the mountain passes of green Lebanon and snowy Hermon, travelled down the valley of the upper Jordan, until He reached the coasts of Decapolis, a large, half-heathen district to the east and south-east of the Sea of Galilee.

The ten cities after which the region was called had once belonged to the Jews, but had passed out of their hands at the Captivity. Rebuilt and beautified by the Romans on their conquest of the country, they were now inhabited by a mixed race of many nationalities. Jewish merchants and Greek traders trafficked in the same market-places, Syrians and Arabs jostled one another in the streets; and in every city, side by side with the little synagogue, could be seen the great heathen temple

towering on high, adorned with its statues of strange gods, and hung with paintings and tapestries and other rich offerings of its worshippers.

Half-heathen as the people of Decapolis were, however, they gladly received Jesus, and during His stay amongst them many of their sick felt the healing touch of His blessed hands.

Among the other sufferers who came to Him was a deaf man, who had an impediment in his speech. Taking the sufferer by the hand Jesus led him to some quiet place, away from the busy, curious crowd. Then, perhaps to help his faith and to encourage him to believe that his case was not a hopeless one, He put His fingers into the poor, deaf ears and touched the stammering tongue. After this, He looked up to Heaven, and with a sigh, partly of sorrow for the man himself, partly of grief at the thought of all the misery and suffering that sin had brought into the world, He said, 'Ephatha'—be opened. And at His word the deaf man's ears were unstopped and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plainly.

Jesus, to avoid being thronged by idle crowds, gave orders that the miracle should not be made known, but the friends of the man who had been cured could not contain their joy and happiness, and went about spreading the news everywhere. 'He hath done all things well,' they said. 'He maketh both the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak.'

Dear child, the people who spoke these words were probably heathen people and really knew very little about Jesus, but yet how true their words were. If we wanted a motto for the Wonderful Life could we have a better one than this, 'He hath done all things well'? Think of all the great and lovely lives you have ever known or read of, and you will not find one without some flaw.

But how different it is with Jesus. Whether we think of Him as the little Child learning His lessons at Mary's knee, or as the gentle Boy serving Joseph in the carpenter's shop at Nazareth; whether He comes before us as the mighty Healer, able to cure every sickness and disease, or the great Teacher and Consoler, showing men the way to God and binding up the wounds of sin and sorrow, we can truthfully say of His life that we find no fault in it at all.

And yet men hated Him. Does it not seem strange? His own people rejected Him. In the end, the world nailed Him, its best Friend, to the Cross!

From Decapolis Jesus turned His steps once more towards the Sea of Galilee. As He journeyed, the people flocked around Him, as men flock around the banner of a king when he goes through the land gathering soldiers for his train. He was now in a desert place among the mountains, and as the half-heathen people gathered about Him from all parts, He healed their sick, and standing on the slope of one of the hills He spoke to them of the One True God, who 'made Heaven and earth, the sea and all that therein is, who keepeth His promise for ever.' He told them, can we doubt it? that the heathen were His children as well as the Jews, and that God loved them and willed to do them good, and had sent His Son to gather all the world into His fold. Painters have painted wonderful pictures of Jesus as King in His royal robes and with a halo of gold around His brow, but hardly any picture is so beautiful as this one of the Good Shepherd, tending the lost and wandering sheep, whose souls no man cared for; binding up their wounds and guiding their weary feet into the Heavenly way.

No wonder the people listened eagerly as Jesus taught them. Day after day passed by and found them still

lingering around their Teacher. It seemed as if they would never tire of listening to the glad news of a Father's love—

‘As for some dear familiar strain
Untired we ask and ask again,
Ever in its melodious store
Finding a spell unheard before.’

At last Jesus called His disciples to Him and told them how sorry He felt for the people. They had been with Him three days and their scanty stock of food was all gone, and He could not bear to send them away fasting, lest they should faint by the way, for many of them had come from afar. The disciples, however, were unable to see how this could be helped. How was it possible to procure food in the wilderness for over four thousand people? It seems strange that they should have forgotten how Jesus, not long before, had fed over five thousand people with five barley loaves and two small fishes; but perhaps they did not think it likely that He would work a second miracle so soon after the first. Besides, the crowd was mostly composed of foreigners, despised Gentile people; was it to be expected that Jesus should work a miracle to feed these?

Jesus, however, asked them as before, ‘How many loaves have ye?’ And taking the seven loaves and few small fishes that were brought Him, He blessed them and broke them into pieces. Then once more we see the crowd seated in companies upon the ground and the disciples going up and down the long ranks distributing the food that, by Jesus’ power, is found sufficient for all their needs.

Then, after all had eaten, again the fragments are gathered up—this time in a great rope basket, which they fill seven times over with the broken pieces.

And the four thousand streamed away across the plain; and in many a village and hamlet and town that night would the story of Jesus' love and compassion be repeated; little children would go to sleep with His Name upon their lips; and many a heathen man and woman, pondering over the message He had brought them, would turn away from their idols and begin henceforth to feel after the true God, if haply they might find Him.

After feeding the hungry multitude, Jesus went down to the sea, and, entering the little fishing-boat, steered for the opposite shore, where the little white town of Magdala lay embosomed among its trees. There He was met by a band of Pharisees and Sadducees and fashionable followers of Herod, who asked Him to give them a sign from Heaven to prove His claim to be the Christ. But Jesus would give no such sign. He knew the most wonderful miracle in the world would never convince men who did not wish to be convinced. Once more entering the boat with His disciples He returned to the eastern side of the lake. He never came back to preach or to teach in the fair land of Gennesaret again.

XIV

ST. PETER'S BRAVE CONFESSION AT CÆSAREA PHILIPPI—
HOW THE KING APPEARED IN HIS GLORY ON THE
MOUNTAIN—THE HEALING OF THE LUNATIC BOY

AFTER leaving the coasts of Magdala, Jesus landed at the northern corner of the lake, near Bethsaida Julias. Here He worked another miracle. They brought a blind man to Him and besought Him to touch him. Jesus, the Light of the World, had a heart of pity for all poor sufferers who dwelt in darkness, shut out of the light of God's day, and He looked with compassion on the man before Him. Leading him aside, He touched and anointed the vacant, sightless eyes; and slowly the darkness and the mist cleared away, and the blind man saw clearly.

Leaving Bethsaida, Jesus and His disciples now began to journey northwards, in the direction of the city of Cæsarea Philippi. The road by which they travelled passed through some of the most lovely scenery of the Holy Land. The valleys everywhere were laid out with rich cornfields and vineyards; the streams ran among the hills, watering enormous forests of oak and fig and mulberry, while great mountains rose on every side, their spurs spread with the silver mantle of the olive, and stained with great crimson splashes of oleander bloom. As the road wound upwards, gradually the lofty mountain-top

of giant Hermon began to rise to view, 'like the snow-white head of an old man'; and presently the bright little pleasure city of Cæsarea Philippi itself could be seen, planted at the mountain's foot, with its trim gardens, its baths and theatre, and its splendid white marble temple gleaming among the trees.

How fair and beautiful it all was. And yet the hearts of the disciples were heavy within them as they followed Jesus. The hour of their Master's triumph seemed strangely long in coming. They were troubled by the signs of the times; the fickleness of the people, the growing hatred of the Jews. For what was Jesus waiting? Why did He not stretch forth His hand and take His crown? Even the thoughts of Jesus were sad and solemn ones. It was His last year on earth; a few short months and it would all be over—all the earthly struggles and disappointments, all the suffering and the toil; the Way of Sorrows would have led Him to the Cross.

Leaving His disciples for awhile He went apart and prayed.

As they descended into the plain, Jesus put a question to His disciples, 'Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?' It was a question they found it easy to answer. They were constantly hearing friends and enemies alike eagerly discussing who Jesus was. But what a variety of answers there were! There were those who, like guilty Herod, thought that Jesus was really St. John the Baptist risen again from the dead; others that He was the great prophet Elijah, who the Jews believed would one day appear again on earth, rising like a star from the crystal depths of the Sea of Galilee; others that He was the saintly Jeremiah or one of the lesser prophets.

When the disciples had finished telling Jesus all this, He said to them, 'But whom say ye that I am?' Like a flash came St. Peter's answer, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.'

How this brave confession must have gladdened Jesus' heart. It did not matter so much what the world thought about Him just then, but it mattered very much what His disciples thought, for it was to be their task to teach the world after He had gone, and to bring it over to His side, and everything depended upon their belief as to who He really was.

Turning to St. Peter Jesus solemnly blesses Him. He calls Him Peter the Rock, and tells him that upon the rock of his steadfast, loving heart He would build His Church, and that it should be so strongly built that all the powers of evil should never shake it. He tells him that in the new Kingdom he should be Bearer of the Keys to unlock the doors of the Kingdom and all its treasures to those worthy to enter in, and to close them against the unworthy. He gives him the promise He afterwards gave the other apostles, that ruling the Church wisely and in accordance with God's will, the acts of the King's ambassador on earth should be confirmed by the King Himself in Heaven.

After this Jesus began to speak plainly to His disciples about His coming sufferings. He told them that He was going up to Jerusalem, there to be rejected by the people and put to death by cruel hands, and that on the third day He would rise again.

Simply and tenderly He spoke, and as they listened their hearts were filled with wonder and dismay. They could not grasp the meaning of His words. What had suffering and death to do with their King? However dark the future might seem, was He not bound to

triumph in the end? In spite of all that Scribe and Pharisee could do, should they not see Him one day in His kingly robes reigning in Jerusalem? St. Peter was especially disturbed, and drawing Jesus aside he began to argue with Him, and to find fault with what He had said. No! such a thing should never be; Jesus must be mistaken; God would never permit it.

Then Jesus turned, and, in the presence of all the apostles, sternly rebuked St. Peter, whose brave confession He had so lately praised.

He called him Satan, or adversary, meaning that he was acting the devil's part, who in the wilderness, you remember, had tried to persuade Jesus that the Crown could be won without the Cross. He told him that he—Peter the Man of Rock—was a stone of stumbling in His path, for his thoughts and aims were not of Heaven but of earth.

God's ways are often dark and hard to tread; to serve Him we must be prepared to suffer loss and pain. That was the lesson the disciples had to learn that day.

Calling the people together, Jesus began to describe to them and to His disciples the service to which His followers were called. He told them that whoever would come after Him must first learn to deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Him. The cross—ah, that meant something very hard and difficult! The cross was the heavy burden beneath whose weight the poor criminal bent as he dragged his weary steps to the place of execution. It stood for sadness, suffering, pain. In this sense there was no life without its cross; only so much depended on the way the cross was carried. Jesus' disciples must not drag their cross as the criminal dragged his. They must be ready to endure suffering for His sake patiently; they must for His sake learn cheerfully to

sacrifice what they held most dear ; they must be content to give up their own way for God's way, without murmuring and discontent. This, together with the daily patient following in His footsteps, was what His service meant. Yet those who thus served the King should not be disappointed with their wages. They might lose a life of worldly ease and self-pleasing, but in its stead they would gain a better, grander life, even the Heavenly life eternal.

For six days Jesus and His disciples wandered amid the wheatfields and the vineyards that wreathed the lower slopes of the great mountain, whose top was set so high among the clouds.

Afterwards 'taking with Him Peter, James, and John,' He began to ascend the mountain-side. We have already seen how Jesus loved the great solitary mountains. They seemed to lift Him away from the cares and troubles of earth and bring Him close to the very gates of Heaven. Kneeling on the mountain-top He breathed a purer air ; the breezes that played around Him came laden with the sound of the bells of His own dear City, and He seemed to hear the faint songs of the angels and the throbbing of their harps of gold.

It was growing towards evening, and as Jesus and His three disciples climbed higher and higher, the shadows began to darken about their path, and presently the sky was all ablaze with stars, and the far-off mountain-top, with its stretches of snow veining its rocky boulders, began to glitter beneath the moonlight like some great mass of ebony seamed with silver.

Having gained one of the lower heights, Jesus withdrew Himself a little distance from His disciples and knelt long in earnest prayer to God. As He prayed a wonderful thing took place. Suddenly He became glorious ; His face shone with a strange unearthly light,

and His garments became white and glistening as the moonlit mountain snow. It was the light of the glory of God streaming through the veil of His human form; the same bright light which afterwards shone before the dazzled eyes of St. John at Patmos, when the Risen Lord appeared to him, and he fell at His feet as dead.

Wearied with their long climb, the disciples had wrapped themselves in their cloaks, and were now fast asleep, but the glory which streamed from the face and form of Jesus quickly awakened them, just as the glory of the angel had awakened the shepherds on the Bethlehem hills. They looked up and saw their Master, but oh, how changed He was! 'His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and His eyes were as a flame of fire, and His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace . . . and His countenance as the sun shineth in his strength.'

As they gazed, wondering and afraid, they saw there were two men talking with Jesus, and they knew, though there was none to tell them this, that they were Moses and Elijah, the great lawgiver and the mighty prophet, whose work and teaching Jesus had come to gather up and fulfil. There they stood, those two great saints of the dim, far-off days, one on either side and Jesus in the midst. 'It was as though Moses had brought the tables of the ten commandments from distant and awful Sinai and had laid them at Jesus' feet; while Elijah had laid there also the harp of prophecy which had sounded so sweetly and grandly in his hands in the far-off times.'

Long and earnestly did these holy men talk with Jesus, and their talk was all about His sufferings and death. We should have thought, perhaps, that at a time like this, theirs would have been some brighter theme;



THE TRANSFIGURATION

that they would have spoken of His glorious Resurrection and Ascension, the triumph and the victory instead of the suffering and the death. Ah, but it was the suffering and the death that should pave the way for the triumph. There could be no victory without the bitter fight. Jesus was not to go up to joy without first suffering pain; He could not enter into His glory before He was crucified.

Meanwhile the apostles were gazing at the vision like men in a dream, half-dazed with awe and wonder. At last St. Peter, always the first to speak, found a voice. 'Master,' he cried, 'it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.' Oh, how beautiful upon the mountains were the feet of Jesus and His saints! How good it was to see his Master enthroned in glory, like the King He was, like the King His people should yet acknowledge Him to be! If the vision could but last for ever; if the three would but remain till his eager hands should weave three leafy booths for them to dwell in, such as the Passover pilgrims used, and his voice summon all Galilee and Jerusalem to the sight!

Poor Peter! It was an idle dream. Moses and Elias belonged to another world than this; it was not possible for them to stay upon an earthly mountain. Nor could Jesus stay there; there was work waiting for Him to do below; there was the journey to Jerusalem still to take; there was that other mountain-side to climb, 'the place which is called Calvary.' It was there, not here, His throne was set.

Even as St. Peter spoke, another marvel followed hard upon the first. Suddenly a cloud of dazzling light appeared in the heavens and overshadowed them, and from the cloud came a Voice, the Voice that had already

witnessed to Jesus at His baptism ; ' This is My beloved Son ; hear Him.' It was the Voice of God.

Trembling and sore afraid, the disciples fell upon their faces to the ground, not daring to look up or move. Presently Jesus came and touched them, and they lifted up their heads, to find themselves upon the mountain-side alone with Him ; the cloud vanished, the glory gone ; only the quiet stars looking down upon them from the sky with their steadfast eyes.

Dear child, we can well imagine how this vision of Jesus in glory must have heartened the disciples after what had passed ; and how the memory of it would comfort and cheer them in the sad time to come. Jesus had led them up the mountain-side for this. He knew the sorrow and the pain that was in store for them ; how hard they would find it to hold fast to their belief in Him, in the face of the suffering and humiliation that was coming on. And so He gave them the vision to strengthen their faith, and to help them to keep up a brave heart, even when things seemed at their very worst.

Next day, as the sun rose, Jesus and the three apostles began to descend the mountain, and as they went He talked to them of the vision of the night before, and bade them speak of it to no one until such time as He should rise again. What did Jesus mean by ' rising again,' they wondered, but they were afraid to ask Him what He meant. One question, however, they did put to Him. They had seen Elijah on the mountain, but it had only been for a moment, the next the cloud of glory had wrapped him in its folds, and he had disappeared from mortal sight. How then was it that they had been taught to believe that before the coming of Christ Elijah should again appear on earth, and restore to Israel its ancient glories ?

And Jesus answered that Elijah had already come ;

he had done his work and borne his witness, and his reward had been suffering and death ; just as suffering and death should be the reward of his Master after him. Then the disciples understood that Jesus was speaking of St. John the Baptist.

On reaching the mountain-foot, Jesus found the people gathered together awaiting His coming. The little knot of disciples He had left behind were in great trouble. A poor distressed father had brought his son to them, in the hope that they might be able to cast out an evil spirit that tormented him, and they had tried to do so, and had tried in vain.

The disciples had often cast out devils in the name and by the power of Jesus, but in this case they seemed quite unable to do anything ; their power was gone ; and it had gone because their faith had gone.

Jesus had disappeared up the mountain-side, and no doubt they missed Him and felt lost without Him. Then their hearts were heavy and cast down by what He had told them about His death. Besides, the case was of a very severe and difficult kind, and the Scribes and Pharisees with their sneering, mocking faces had come crowding round, ready to laugh and jeer at them if they failed in their attempt ; and they began to be afraid lest they should fail—and so ended in failing.

When Jesus drew near, they were standing with shamed and downcast faces, with a ring of their enemies round them, arguing and finding fault with them, and taking no pains to hide their joy and satisfaction at what had taken place.

Was there some glint of Heavenly glory still lingering about the face of Jesus, some touch of light like that which shone upon the face of Moses as he came down from the mount where God had met him ? Perhaps so,

for the crowd, we are told, were filled with a great awe and wonder when they saw Him, and began to run to meet Him, and do Him reverence. The next moment the poor heart-broken father was pouring out his piteous tale into Jesus' ear. The boy, he told Him, was possessed of a dumb spirit; and he went on to describe how, when the evil spirit seized him, he was thrown to the ground in dreadful convulsions, grinding his teeth and foaming at the mouth. 'And I brought Him to Thy disciples,' he added sadly, 'and they could not cure him.'

'Bring him unto Me,' comes the command, and they bring the boy to Jesus. And when the evil spirit saw the stern, set face of the King, and knew into whose presence it had come, it cowered and began to tear the little lad, so that he fell down writhing at Jesus' feet. Then Jesus asked the unhappy father how long his son had been thus devil-possessed; and he answered, from the time he had been a little innocent child; and always the cruel malignant spirit was on the watch to destroy him by casting him into the fire and water.

'But if Thou canst do anything,' he urged in broken tones, 'have compassion upon us and help us.'

And Jesus answered, 'If thou canst believe; all things are possible to him that believeth.' As He spoke, new hope sprang up in the father's heart. He looked into the starry eyes of Jesus, and in a moment all his doubts and fears seemed to melt away. 'Lord, I believe,' he cried, with the tears running down his cheeks, 'help Thou mine unbelief.' And Jesus, because he believed, gave him his heart's desire. Swiftly comes the word of power, 'Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him,' and the devil with a shriek and a desperate struggle comes out of the lad, and he sways and falls fainting to the ground. 'He

is dead,' whisper the people to one another as they crowd around ; but he was not dead. Jesus had set him free, to live henceforth a new and happier life. Bending down, He took the little lad's hand in His own strong, tender hand, and raising him up gave him back to his father.

Silently and sadly the disciples followed Jesus from the scene of their defeat. When they were alone they asked Him the reason of their want of success, and He told them it was because of their want of faith, because they had not the courage to trust God. And then He spoke to them of the wonderful power of faith. He told them that if they had faith as a grain of mustard seed—the very smallest atom of true faith—they could with a word tear great snowy Hermon from its rocky bed and fling it afar into the sea, and nothing should be impossible to them.

He meant by this that if His disciples would only learn the lesson of simple faith in God nothing could conquer them ; the obstacles in their way of serving God, the great mountains of difficulty that blocked their way to Heaven would all be cast down and disappear.

And so, dear child, He speaks to us. God loves to be trusted. Trust Him, and you will find no task He sets before you too hard for you to do. They tell this story of one of His greatest saints of bygone times, St. Teresa. She went to Paris to prepare to found a school for poor, deserted, orphan children. But there was a great mountain in her way. When she counted her money she found she had only two little copper coins, not worth a penny. She said, 'Teresa and two sous are nothing, but Teresa and two sous, *and God* are everything.' And she just put her hand in God's hand, and went bravely forward to the work, and lo ! the mountain disappeared ; God smoothed

her difficulties away, and in the end she was not disappointed of her hope.

That is the only way to level mountains. . . . 'Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts.'

XV

THE SERMON PREACHED BY A LITTLE CHILD—A LESSON
ABOUT FORGIVENESS — JESUS AT THE FEAST OF
TABERNACLES — THE MAN WHO WAS BORN BLIND
—THE ALLEGORY OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD

THE visit to Cæsarea Philippi at an end, Jesus once more turned His face towards Galilee and Capernaum. After the warnings He had given His disciples not to expect earthly glory or earthly rewards in His service, it seems strange to find them disputing among themselves by the way as to who should be the greatest in the kingdom which they thought He was about to set up in Jerusalem. Yet so it was. Perhaps the trouble arose because of the special mark of favour which Jesus had shown the three disciples whom He had taken up the Mount of Transfiguration; perhaps it was because of the special honour He had bestowed on St. Peter, by making him the Bearer of the Keys. In any case, each of the disciples seemed to think that the chief place belonged by right to himself; and soon angry feelings began to be aroused, and these in their turn found vent in angry words.

Jesus seemed to take no notice of the dispute at the time, but when they had reached Capernaum, and had entered St. Peter's house, He called His disciples to Him and asked them the reason why they had thus fallen out by the way. The disciples hung their heads; Jesus was always teaching them that the highest glory lay in forget-

fulness of self, and they knew enough about Him to feel sure that He would not be pleased to hear that their quarrel had been about places and rewards.

There was a little boy standing near Jesus at the time. Perhaps he had been playing in the street, and hearing that Jesus had come back to Capernaum, had run to meet Him, and had followed Him home. The children would always run to Jesus when they saw Him coming. As He walked along the streets, they would come crowding round Him and follow Him, holding on to His hand, and nestling beneath His woollen cloak. No one told them such beautiful stories as Jesus did, no one was half so kind and tender and loving as He. He was quite the best and dearest Friend they had. Taking the little fellow up in His arms, Jesus told His disciples that if they would enter the Kingdom of Heaven they must turn and become even as that little child, that is to say, as loving and trustful, as humble-minded and obedient. The more childlike in heart they became, He said, the higher their place in His Kingdom would be. And then with a tender glance at the little face turned up so trustfully and lovingly to His own, He went on to say some beautiful things about little children.

He told His disciples that He counted all kindness and compassion shown to a little child as shown to Himself. He reminded them how dear a child's innocence is in God's eyes, and how fearfully He would punish any one who led a little child into temptation, and taught it to sin. He spoke of the children's angels, those bright spirits who, by day and night, spread their white wings over God's little ones, to guard and protect them. In Heaven, He said, the children's angels stand nearest to God's throne, by which He seems to teach that the children are nearest to His Father's heart.

Sometime after this, Jesus was speaking to the disciples about the right way of treating a wrongdoer. Should they be treated badly by any one, they were not to deal harshly with him in return; they were to treat him with all gentleness and consideration. St. Peter, who had been listening attentively, here broke in with a question. Jesus had taught that a wrongdoer must be forgiven. Yes, but supposing he behaved badly again, and kept on behaving badly, what then? would it be enough to forgive him seven times?

St. Peter thought that he was making a very generous allowance, for the Jewish Rabbis taught that no man could be expected to forgive more than three times. Judge of his astonishment when Jesus answered, 'Not until seven times, but until seventy times seven'—that is to say, you must always keep on forgiving, you must never harden your heart against one who has done you wrong. To drive this lesson home to St. Peter's heart, Jesus told him the story of the unmerciful servant.

There was a king, He said, who began to add up the different sums his servants owed him. Among the debtors brought before him was one whose debt was so enormous that it ran into millions of pounds. The debtor was quite unable to pay this great sum, and so the king, after the cruel fashion of those days, ordered him to be sold as a slave, and his wife and children and all that he had, that some fragment of payment at any rate might be made.

Then the wretched servant fell down at the king's feet and implored his mercy; only give him time and he would pay the debt in full. So pitifully did he plead that the king's heart was touched; he forgave him the entire debt and let him go free. But the kindness and mercy that had been shown by the king did not in the

least soften the servant's own hard and unforgiving spirit. Going from the king's presence and finding one of his fellow-servants, who owed him a paltry debt of about three pounds, he seized him by the throat, and, taking no notice of his prayers and entreaties, thrust him into prison till he should pay the debt.

Angry and indignant at this piece of cruelty, the fellow-servants came and reported the matter to the king. Then the king summons the unmerciful servant before him once more. 'O thou wicked servant!' he sternly says, 'I forgave thee all that debt because thou desiredst me; shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee?' And in his anger the king revokes his forgiveness, and the unmerciful servant finds himself saddled once more with his enormous debt, and is sent to prison until he should pay it to the uttermost farthing.

Having ended the parable, Jesus gave His disciples the key to its meaning. 'So likewise shall my Heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.'

You see the meaning of the story? The King is God; we are His servants; the debt we owe Him is the great debt of perfect love and obedience, 'the happy service of a stainless life.' But that is a debt we can never pay; we are always falling into sin and coming short of what God requires of us, and so the account against us mounts higher and higher, and grows heavier and heavier. And there is nothing to be done; we cannot make amends for our disobedience; we cannot undo the past. Yet God is loving and merciful, and if we are really sorry for our sins and long to be forgiven, He will, if we ask Him, blot out the record written against us, and lift away the heavy burden of our debt. Only, to be forgiven, we must learn

to forgive ; God will not pardon our wrongdoing unless we are first of all ready to pardon those who have done us wrong. That is the lesson Jesus would have us learn from this parable. Let me tell you of a little boy who once learned it by His help. He was the son of a king. His father and mother had both suffered death at the time of the French Revolution, when lawless men seized the reins of government, and the guillotine ran red with the blood of the noblest in the land. They took him, when he was only seven years old, and shut him up in a dark, gloomy prison. There, like some wild bird from the woods thrust into a cage, he slowly pined away ; the golden hair his mother loved to comb became matted with dirt ; his round childish face grew pale and wan with suffering and ill-health. His gaoler, a cruel, wicked man who treated him very badly, asked him one day what he would do, supposing the French ever made him king like his father. The child replied, ‘ I would forgive you.’ He never was crowned king, poor child, on earth, but I like to think that when death ended his sufferings, as it did soon afterwards, Jesus met him and crowned him with the better crown He keeps for those who love Him and follow in His steps.

Here then is a rule for our own lives, ‘ Be ye kind one to another ; tender-hearted, forgiving one another ; even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.’

It was now the fall of the year, and Jesus and His disciples prepared to go up to Jerusalem to keep the joyous Feast of Tabernacles. As they journeyed southwards everything around them pointed to the time of the ingathering of the autumn fruits. The trees of the forest had begun to put on their robes of red and gold ; everywhere the labourers were busy at work, gathering the grape clusters from the vines, or stripping the olive-trees of their shining

berries. As they drew near the borders of Samaria, Jesus sent on a party of the disciples to seek for a lodging in one of the villages. But the people of the village that they first entered, learning that they were pilgrims going up to Jerusalem, shut their doors against them, and refused them shelter, and Jesus was obliged to pass on, hungry and weary.

St. James and St. John, 'the Sons of Thunder,' were very angry at the slight put upon their Master; so angry that they even wanted to call down fire from Heaven to strike these unfriendly villagers dead. But Jesus told them that their thought was a wild and wicked one; He had not, He said, come to destroy men's lives but to save them.

There was 'something starry' about Jesus' face that attracted all kinds of people to His side. On this particular journey three men came to Him at different times begging to be allowed to follow Him. Instead of bidding them welcome, however, Jesus bade them pause and count the cost of the step they proposed to take. His service was hard and difficult; if they followed Him they must be prepared to give up everything they held most dear; and they must never turn back. As He speaks, we seem to see their faces fall; presently one after another they turn sorrowfully away. They were not of the stuff of which disciples of the Cross could be fashioned.

On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus found the Holy City thronged with excited crowds, drawn from nearly every part of the world, all in holiday dress, and carrying branches of palm, woven round with willow and myrtle, in their hands. Courtyard and street and city wall were jewelled with thousands of little emerald booths, formed of the leafy boughs of the palm and olive and citron-tree.

It was like a scene from fairyland. Everywhere these little green tabernacles were to be seen, even the hills round about Jerusalem were full of them; for the Feast of Tabernacles was kept in remembrance of the time when the Israelites dwelt in tents in the wilderness, and while it was in progress every one must leave his house and live out of doors.

Threading His way through the little green avenues which stretched on every side of Him, Jesus at last found Himself in His Father's House. There, amid the marble corridors of the Temple, He sat and taught, and as they listened the people wondered, questioning among themselves whether He were really the Christ or not.

Among the many interesting ceremonies connected with the Feast of Tabernacles was one which was intended to call to mind the wonderful miracle of olden days, when, to give drink to His thirsty people, God 'smote the stony rock indeed, that the water gushed out.' Every morning one of the Temple priests headed a great procession down to a pool at the foot of the Temple rock, called the Pool of Siloam. In his hand he carried a golden pitcher which he filled with clear, bright water. Then, returning to the Temple, he poured the water out upon the great brazen altar. As he did this the choir of white-robed Levites burst forth into the joyous strains of a cluster of David's psalms, known as the great Hallel. When they came to the words, 'Oh give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good: for His mercy endureth for ever,' the thunder of a thousand voices joined in the refrain, and every pilgrim waved the palm branch in his hand, until the crowded court resembled some great leafy wood swept by the wind.

It was the last and great day of the Feast, and on this day the water was not poured out. The Levites had

chanted their psalms, the priests had marched seven times round the altar, and the people, having beaten their palm branches to pieces, were preparing to depart, when suddenly a voice was heard ringing clear and distinct above every other sound. 'If any man thirst let him come unto Me and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly (or heart) shall flow rivers of living water.' It was the voice of Jesus. As it rang out a hush fell upon the crowd. They turned to look, and there He stood, Jesus the Prophet of Nazareth, with outstretched hands, His face aglow with tenderness and love. It was the gift of the Holy Spirit, St. John tells us, that He was promising—the Fountain of living water, God Himself; to be in their hearts a fountain of joy and happiness that should never fail.

As they listened, the hearts of many of the people were strangely moved. Surely none but the Christ Himself could dare to speak such words as these? But though some believed on Him, others doubted.

Among the crowd were a number of servants of the Pharisees. They had been sent to seize Jesus and make Him a prisoner, but the majesty of His presence and the wonder of His words struck them with amazement. They went back again empty-handed to those who had sent them. 'Why have ye not brought Him?' asked the Pharisees angrily; and they answered, 'Never man spake like this man.'

Another ceremony at the Feast of Tabernacles was the lighting of the great golden candlesticks that stood in the Court of the Women. These were four in number, tall gilded pedestals seventy feet high, each crowned with four great lamps. Every evening during the Feast there was a great illumination of these lamps, and hymns were sung, and dancing by torch-light took place, until

the time came for the Temple gates to be shut. Just as the pouring out of the water was meant to remind the people of the water that flowed from the rock in the wilderness, so the lighting of the golden candlesticks recalled the shining pillar of fire that moved before the Israelites on their way to the Promised Land. Perhaps it was with reference to this ceremony and its teaching that we find Jesus, the next day, speaking of Himself under one of His most beautiful names, 'I am the Light of the world; he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.'

Meanwhile the Scribes and Pharisees were growing more and more bitter against Jesus. Day after day they gathered round Him, disputing with Him and seeking to entrap Him in His words. At last, moved to fury by the claim He made to be One with His Father, they took up stones to stone Him; but the time had not yet come for Him to die, and so He passed quietly through the midst of His enemies, just as He had done once before at Capernaum, and went His way unhurt.

One Sabbath day while He was at Jerusalem, Jesus, as He passed through one of the Temple porches, saw a blind man who had come up to the Temple to beg. His was a specially sad case, for the man had been born blind, and so had spent all his life in darkness.

Now the Jews used to think that all great suffering was sent by God as a direct punishment for sin, and the disciples were curious to know whether the blind man had been punished with blindness through his parents' sin, or through some fault of his own. In His answer Jesus taught them not to pass harsh judgments on others because of any special suffering or sorrow in their lives, since suffering might not always be a sign of God's anger, but rather a mark of His love.

The man had been born blind, He said, in order that the glory of God might shine out through his cure. With this Jesus stooped down, and, with moisture taken from His holy lips, He made clay, and anointed the beggar's eyes, and bade him go to the Pool of Siloam and wash.

The blind man had faith in Jesus' power. Staff in hand, he groped his way down the steep hill on which the Temple stood, until he reached the pool at its foot. Then, taking a little water in his hands, he washed his eyes, and lo ! as the water touched them the darkness lifted, and, bathed in the sparkling sunlight, God's beautiful world in all its freshness and splendour lay stretched before him.

Do we not seem to see the look of wondering joy and happiness that lights up the beggar's face, as he turns to go up to the Temple to thank God for His mercy ? The people who meet him hardly recognise him. ' Surely this is not the blind beggar that sat at the Temple gate ? ' they say to one another. But to their astonishment they find it really is he, and when they come crowding round him asking by what miracle he had been made to see, he answers that it was ' a man that is called Jesus ' who had done it all.

Presently we see the beggar standing before a council of the Pharisees, and being questioned as to what had happened. As he tells them the tale of his cure, and mentions Jesus' name, scowling looks are interchanged, and angry whispers go round. They profess not to believe his story at first, but when they find they cannot prove it false, they begin to attack Jesus, calling Him a sinner, and hinting that He was no better than an impostor. But the beggar would not agree to this ; he was only a poor beggar, and they, his judges, were rich and influential Pharisees, but he was not willing to stand by

and hear Jesus attacked, without saying a word in His defence. Whoever Jesus might be, he answered, He certainly could not be a sinner, for He had worked a miracle such as never had been worked in all the world before, and His working it was a proof that He came down from God.

Enraged at the beggar's answer, the Pharisees 'cast him out,' that is, they locked the door of the synagogue against him, and forbade him to attend its services.

Jesus heard what had befallen His brave confessor, and He sought him out. When He had found him He asked him if he believed on the Son of God. The beggar had never seen Jesus until that instant, but directly He spoke he knew His voice—he would never forget its music in all the coming years. 'Who is He, Lord?' he eagerly asked. Jesus answered, 'It is He that talketh with thee.' And as He spoke light poured in upon the beggar's soul. In a flash he saw the truth; Jesus Himself was the Son of God; and with the cry, 'Lord, I believe,' he fell down at His feet and worshipped Him.

It was shortly after this that Jesus drew that beautiful picture of Himself as the Good Shepherd, which we all know and love so well.

The Pharisees professed to be shepherds of the people and to teach and lead them in God's ways, but they were false shepherds, thinking only of themselves and caring little for the sheep. Jesus said He was the Good Shepherd, the true, the fair, the beautiful, ready to dare all things for His sheep, not holding back His life to save them from the wolf. As the Good Shepherd He knew His sheep with the perfect knowledge of an all-loving heart. He went before them on the hard and rugged road to Heaven, and as He went He called them with His loving

voice, and they followed Him and He gave them Eternal Life. There were other sheep belonging to Him, now lost in the darkness and wandering on the mountains of the world, but all should one day be gathered into His fold, and there should be one flock under one Shepherd.

Does any other name speak to us in such a simple yet beautiful way of Jesus' love and tenderness as this of the Good Shepherd, I wonder? You have heard of the Catacombs at Rome, those dark underground passages hollowed out in all directions beneath the city, where the early Christians used to lead a hunted life, worshipping God in hourly peril of imprisonment and death? Upon the walls of these passages are to be seen to-day many traces of pictures drawn in rude outline upon the walls. And the favourite picture of all is Jesus with a shepherd's crook, carrying a lamb upon His shoulders.

Fathers and mothers, we may be sure, would often point out this picture of the Good Shepherd to their little children, and tell them the story of that great love of His which led Him to lay down His life for the sheep. And as they listened the children's eyes would fill with tears, and the thought of the Good Shepherd's love would sink into their hearts. And so it has been ever since. The picture of Jesus the Good Shepherd has been dearer to His people perhaps than any other. Especially have the children always loved it best. Do you remember those words of the prophet Isaiah where he speaks of Jesus as carrying the lambs in His bosom?

In the village of Bemerton, where good George Herbert lived and worked in bygone days, a parish priest well remembers going to visit a little girl who was dying of heart disease. One day he took her a little drawing of the Good Shepherd, and he will never forget how her face lighted up at the sight of it. She used to lie and

look at it, and when her bad attacks of pain came on she could not rest until she had it on her bed. She died holding it in her hands.

‘The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; He leadeth me beside the still waters. . . . Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.’

XVI

THE MISSION OF THE SEVENTY—THE HEALING OF THE
TEN LEPERS—JESUS TEACHES HIS DISCIPLES TO PRAY
—THE PARABLES OF THE RICH CHURL AND THE
GOOD SAMARITAN—THE HOME OF BETHANY

DRIVEN away from Jerusalem by the plots of His enemies, Jesus went back again to Galilee. There He remained for a little while, quietly preparing Himself for the end which was now drawing very near; then once more He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem to meet His death. As He went He sent a band of seventy disciples, two by two, to go before Him into the different towns and villages through which His road lay, to preach the good news of the Kingdom, and to gather fresh soldiers under His banner.

Jesus knew His cause must triumph in the end, and He went on calmly laying the foundations of His Kingdom, although He foresaw all the suffering and pain and seeming defeat that was coming on. He knew how impossible it was for men to fight against God, and how the shame and the failure must in the end serve as stepping-stones to victory. Passing between the borders of Galilee and Samaria He made His way into Peræa, a district lying to the east of the Jordan.

As He passed by one of the villages, Jesus saw a band of ten men huddled together by the roadside awaiting

His approach. There was no need to ask the reason of their sad and miserable appearance; their hideous garb of sackcloth, their poor disfigured faces, their bandaged hands, proclaimed them to be lepers. As soon as they caught sight of Jesus they all set up together a hoarse imploring cry, 'Jesus, Master, have mercy upon us.' Jesus looked at them with pity in His eyes. 'Go show yourselves unto the priests,' He said. It was as much as to say, 'Your prayer is granted; you have only to show yourselves to the priest to be pronounced clean.' And the lepers believed Jesus' word; they turned to go, and as they went they felt the thrill of a new life within their veins, the taint of leprosy disappeared, and their flesh came again like the flesh of a little child.

Yet although by a word Jesus had rescued these ten men from a living death, and given them back the blessings of health and home and happiness, only one of them took the trouble to turn back to thank their Deliverer, and he was a poor, despised, outcast Samaritan. Jesus was growing accustomed to ingratitude, yet He felt the thanklessness of these men very deeply.

'Were there not ten cleansed?' He asked sorrowfully, 'but where are the nine? There are not found who returned to give glory to God, save this stranger. Then turning to the man at His feet, 'Arise, go thy way;' He said, 'thy faith hath made thee whole.'

An old legend tells us that God was so angry with the ungrateful nine that, as a punishment for their ingratitude, He gave them back their leprosy again. But, however this may be, they lost at any rate a precious gift the grateful Samaritan gained—I mean Christ's blessing. They received the healing of the body; he received the better healing of his soul as well.

We know how much time Jesus used to spend in prayer. 'Prayer came as naturally from Jesus' lips as perfume from a flower.' Though day by day His feet trod the dusty paths of earth, yet His heart was always turned towards Heaven. One day as He was praying, His disciples stood looking on with wistful eyes. Ah, if they could only pray like Jesus! When they tried to pray, the words would not come. They wanted to speak to God, but they hardly knew what to say to Him or how to say it. If Jesus would only teach them! Jesus was glad to find that His disciples desired to pray better, for in prayer, He knew, lay the grand secret of a holy life, and without prayer the soul could not be kept alive. And so in answer to their request, 'Lord, teach us to pray,' He gave them 'the pearl of prayers,' as it has been called, that most beautiful of all petitions, which we know by the name of the 'Lord's prayer.' 'When ye pray,' He said, 'say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.'

And then, having taught His disciples how to pray, Jesus went on to tell them never to get tired of praying. God might sometimes seem to turn a deaf ear to their prayers, but if they only kept on praying earnestly and perseveringly He would send them an answer in the end. To impress this truth upon their minds, He told them the story of the man with the empty cupboard. One night a certain man receives a visit from a friend who is taking a journey, and to his dismay he finds he has no food to set before him. In the East it is considered a great disgrace

to let a guest go hungry, and the host is at his wits' end to know what to do. Suddenly he bethinks himself of another friend of his who lives close by. Why should he not go and borrow some bread of him? he thinks. And so he goes to his friend's house, and, standing beneath his window, calls out to him and asks him to lend him three loaves. But the friend is in bed and in no particular hurry to get up. 'I have gone to bed,' he cries out in answer, 'and the door is fastened. I cannot help you.' But the man keeps on begging for just three loaves, until at last, with a sigh and a grumble, the tired sleeper gets up from his bed and goes to his cupboard and gives the man an armful of loaves, only too glad to be rid of him. If a man can get what he wants from an unwilling friend just by keeping on asking for it, how much more, our Lord seems to say, will earnest persevering prayer avail with God, who is more ready to hear than we are to pray, and is wont to give more than either we desire or deserve.

It was perhaps about this time that a man came to Jesus with the request that He would help him to get his share of some money that had been left him, and which his brother would not give up.

Jesus would have nothing to do with any miserable quarrels about money; besides, He saw the greed and the selfishness that lay at the man's heart, and it displeased Him. 'Man,' He answered, 'who made Me a judge or a divider over you?' And then He began to warn His hearers against the sin of covetousness.

Have you ever thought, with all the riches of the world at His call, how little Jesus cared about money? He lived on charity. A little before, we read how He and His disciples had not half-a-crown amongst them; for when He was asked to pay the Temple tax which

came to about half-a-crown of our money, He had nothing to pay it with, and St. Peter was sent to cast a hook into the sea, and take the silver coin that was asked for, from a fish's mouth.

A man's true life, so Jesus taught, consists in what he is and not in what he has. Life is not riches and enjoyment, it is character; it is being good and doing good. To drive this lesson home, He spoke the parable of the rich churl.

There was once a man whom God had blessed with a very rich estate. Year after year his harvests grew more and more abundant until there was no room left in his storehouses for the produce of his fields. But he was a man of a greedy, grasping spirit; he forgot that his wealth was a trust from God, to be used for the good of others besides himself; to feed the mouth of the hungry and to make the widow's heart to sing for joy. Strolling through his fields one day and taking note of his overfilled storehouses and unstored crops, he said to himself, 'To-morrow I will begin to pull down these storehouses of mine and will build larger and finer ones for myself, and then there will be nothing left to trouble about; I shall be able to look forward to a long and comfortable and easy life for many years to come.' But even as he spoke God's voice sounded in his ears, 'Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?' That night the rich man died. Poor, foolish, rich man! to take so much trouble to get earth's gold which he could not keep, and to lose the better gold of Heaven that would have lasted always—the treasure that no one could have taken from him. So it is, our Lord adds, with all those who lay up treasure for themselves and are not rich towards God—

‘Our treasures moth and rust corrupt,
Or thieves break through and steal, or they
Make themselves wings and fly away.
One man made merry as he supped,
Nor guessed how when that night grew dim,
His soul would be required of him.’

It was the Sabbath day and Jesus was in one of the village synagogues, when He saw before Him a poor woman, whose back was so bent and twisted that for eighteen years she had not been able to sit or stand upright. Laying His hands upon her, Jesus cured her of her sad affliction.

The ruler of the synagogue was very angry because Jesus had worked this miracle of mercy on the Sabbath. But, because he was a coward, he did not dare to attack Jesus openly, but found fault with the woman.

There were six days when it was possible to get cured without breaking God’s law, he said, why had she not sought help on one of these ?

But Jesus turned upon him with indignation, and told him he was a hypocrite. Even a dumb beast might be untied and led to water on the Sabbath day, after having been bound but for a few short hours. Was there any reason why a poor afflicted woman, one of God’s own children, should be treated worse than a beast ? Was it a sin that she should be loosed on the Sabbath day, after having been, by Satan’s power, fast bound in misery and iron for eighteen years ?

And when He said this, all His adversaries were ashamed, and the people rejoiced for the glorious things that were done by Him.

While still journeying towards Jerusalem, Jesus spoke the parable of the good Samaritan. It came in answer to a question put to Him by one of the Jewish lawyers.

‘Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’ Whether the lawyer wanted to test Jesus’ power as a teacher, or whether he really wanted to find out the secret of the Heavenly life, we do not know. At any rate, Jesus told him that he had asked a question which he should have been able to answer for himself.

What was written in the Law? And as He spoke, perhaps, He pointed to the little square black box the lawyer wore upon his wrist, containing the ‘reminder verses’ he used to say as a child at his mother’s knee.

And the lawyer answered, ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.’ ‘Thou hast answered right,’ Jesus said. ‘This do, and thou shalt live.’ But the lawyer was not satisfied. He could not say that Jesus had not given him a perfect answer, but it vexed him to think that the people who stood by should hear him, the clever lawyer, ask a question which could be so easily answered. And so to hide his discomfiture he asked a second question, ‘And who is my neighbour?’ For reply Jesus told him the following story:—

A traveller left Jerusalem one day, intending to go down to the beautiful city of Jericho, which lay about twenty miles off. The road by which he went was a very wild as well as a very dangerous one. It led downhill through a deep and rocky ravine, known as the Bloody Way, because of the robbers who infested it and who used to attack the passers-by, and rob and even murder them. As the traveller, staff in hand, fares onward, suddenly a band of these fierce mountain robbers rush out upon him. They seize him and strip him of everything, even to his very clothes; then a few hasty stabs, and he is left for dead by the roadside.



THE GOOD SAMARITAN

As he lies there all stark and motionless, his life-blood slowly streaming away, a priest comes along the road. He has just been up to Jerusalem to take his turn at offering the Temple sacrifices, and is now returning home to Jericho. He draws near to where the wounded traveller lies; he sees him, but instead of going to his help, he throws a startled glance around and, crossing to the other side of the road, hastens on his way. How does he know that the robbers may not be lurking in some cave near at hand, and that he may not fall into their clutches himself?

Presently another of God's servants comes along. It is a Levite this time, and he too chances upon the wounded man by the roadside. He does not turn aside at once like the priest; he draws near, and, looking down upon the poor stripped body with its cruel gashes, is half inclined to try what he can do to save the traveller's life. But after all, it is no business of his, he thinks. Every one for himself; better move away from such a dangerous spot as soon as possible. So the Levite follows the priest.

But the help these two hard-hearted men deny their dying fellow-countryman is given at last by a man who is a stranger and a foreigner.

A Samaritan comes riding down the glen. He catches sight of the wounded man, and without a thought of the danger that might be lurking among the rocks, caring nothing whether the wounded man is a hated Jew or not, he hastens to his side and does his best to stanch his wounds. Then tenderly bearing him in his arms to where his ass is tethered, he sets him upon its back and brings him to the nearest khan or inn. All night long he stays by his side, and in the morning, taking two silver pieces from his girdle, he gives them to the inn-

keeper, bidding him 'Take care of him, and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.'

When Jesus had finished His story, He asked the lawyer which of these three men he thought was 'neighbour' to the man who fell among the robbers. The lawyer replied, 'He that showed the pity.' Then said Jesus to him, 'Go, and do thou likewise.'

And so the lawyer found his answer; his neighbour was anybody who needed his help. And so Jesus seems to speak to us, bidding us make loving-kindness the law of our lives. 'Be ready,' He seems to say, 'to lend a helping hand to those, whoever they may be, that are in need of help. Whenever you meet any one in trouble, remember he is your neighbour, and act a neighbour's part towards him.'

The kindness you may be able to show may be very small; it may only be to dry the eyes of a little child or to take a bunch of flowers to some sickroom, or to speak a helpful word to one in trouble; but whatever it may be, do it; do not leave it for others to do. It is your work, not theirs.'

Some little barefooted children were once playing in a street in Glasgow. A poor woman, as she passed by the place where they were, bent down and began to gather up something from the pavement. A policeman noticed what she was doing, and, thinking she was carrying off something which did not belong to her, followed her and asked to see what she had been picking up. The poor woman timidly opened her apron and showed him some pieces of broken glass. 'I wanted to take them out of the way of the bairns' feet,' she said. That poor woman had the spirit of the good Samaritan; she had learned the lesson of loving-kindness that Jesus would have us all

learn. 'I shall pass through this world but once,' says a writer; 'any good thing therefore that I can do, or any kindness that I can show to any human being, let me do it now. Let me not defer it or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again.'

Some two miles from Jerusalem, Jesus came to a little village called Bethany. It was the home of two sisters, Martha and Mary, and of their brother, Lazarus. Jesus dearly loved the members of this little household, and they loved Him dearly in return. When He was at Jerusalem, He would often climb the green slope of the Mount of Olives, and make His way to the rocky height upon which the little village stood, in order to spend a quiet hour at Bethany. There would always be a welcome awaiting Him in the home of His friends. Water to bathe His dusty feet would never be lacking, nor a couch whereon to rest; and when He reclined at table, there were loving hands to minister to His every want, and loving hearts ever open to receive His teaching.

The two sisters, Martha and Mary, were both good and holy women, though very different from one another in character. Martha, the elder of the two, was active and warm-hearted and full of energy, while Mary was of a more gentle and thoughtful nature. God does not make His saints according to one set pattern.

How gladly the sisters welcomed Jesus that day, as, footsore and weary, He drew to their door! Eager, happy, bustling Martha must at once begin to get a meal ready for Him—He must be so hungry and thirsty after His long walk, she thinks. And so she sets busily to work to spread the table and kindle the fire and make all the necessary preparations for the midday meal. Meanwhile Mary takes her place at Jesus' feet, and gazing

upon His dear face, she prepares to listen to those tender, wonderful words which only He knew how to speak. To sit at Jesus' feet while He spoke, that was Mary's Heaven.

‘ Her prayer-books had repose,
One word her heart sufficed,
Scent of the hidden rose,
Christ !’

But by and by Martha becomes impatient. She is so anxious to prepare a splendid meal, and there is so much to do, and she is left to do it all alone. Why, instead of sitting still, does not Mary help her ?

‘ Lord,’ she says, coming to Jesus, ‘ do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone ? Bid her therefore that she help me.’

But Jesus only answers, ‘ Martha, Martha, thou art anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is needful, and Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her.’ Jesus was not blaming Martha for being occupied in loving service, but for being over anxious in it. After all there was something more important than earthly food ; there was the food of the soul, and Mary was doing right in caring for this. The earthly food satisfied for a while, the Heavenly food lasted forever.

There are few Bible pictures more pleasant to look upon than this of Jesus at the home of Bethany, with Mary at His feet, and Martha busied at His elbow with acts of loving ministry.

Set here, as it is, in the midst of the story of the growing hatred of Jesus' enemies, it comes like a little patch of blue in a stormy sky.

There is a little poem in which the writer asks herself which of the two sisters whom Jesus loved she

would have liked to be, and this is how she answers her own question—

‘ I cannot choose, I should have liked so much
To sit at Jesus’ feet—to feel the touch
Of His kind, gentle hand upon my head,
While drinking in the gracious words He said.

‘ And yet to serve Him ! O divine employ !—
To minister and give the Master joy,
To bathe in coolest springs His weary feet,
To wait upon Him while He sat at meat !

‘ Worship or service—which ? Ah, that is best
To which He calls us, be it toil or rest—
To labour for Him in life’s busy stir,
Or seek His feet, a silent worshipper.’

XVII

JESUS AT THE FEAST OF DEDICATION — THE MEAL
AT THE PHARISEE'S HOUSE, AND WHAT HAPPENED
AT IT — THE PARABLES OF THE GREAT SUPPER,
THE LOST SHEEP, THE LOST COIN, AND THE PRO-
DIGAL SON

ABOUT two months had passed by since Jesus was at Jerusalem at the Feast of Tabernacles. He now returned to the city once more to keep another joyous feast, the Feast of the Dedication, or the Feast of Lights, as it was also called. This was a festival kept in memory of the re-dedication of the Temple Altar after it had been polluted in a dreadful fashion by the King of Syria, some two hundred years before. It owed its other name, the Feast of Lights, to the fact that as long as it lasted lamps were lighted in every house at sunset, and the Temple itself was brilliantly illuminated, so that the whole city gleamed and sparkled with a thousand fires.

It was 'the cold month' of icy winds and weeping skies, and Jesus was walking in the shelter of the great eastern arcade of the Temple, which went by the name of Solomon's Porch. Hearing that He was in the Temple, the Scribes and Pharisees came crowding around Him, and began to argue and dispute with Him, asking Him to tell them plainly whether He were really the Christ or not. Jesus told them that His works showed who He really was; the reason why they did not believe in Him

was because they had nothing in common with Him; they were not His sheep, and so they did not know His voice. He then went on to make a most tremendous claim; He told them that He and His Father were One. This so enraged the Jews that, in their fury, they took up stones to stone Him; but Jesus' time to die had not yet come. Calmly He confronted them, and again, with the step and bearing of a King, He passed through the midst of the raging crowd unhurt.

He now left Jerusalem to wander once more in Peræa, 'the other side of Jordan,' the fair district of clear streams and sunny cornfields, which ran up to the yellow edges of the eastern desert, and was shadowed by the blue mountains of Gilead. While in Peræa He accepted an invitation from one of the Pharisees to break bread in his house. It was the Sabbath day, and the assembled guests sat watching Jesus with hard, unfriendly eyes, to see whether He would break any of the Sabbath rules. Among the crowd that had followed Him into the Pharisee's house was a man suffering from the dropsy. Turning to the company of self-righteous Pharisees and lawyers who were so eager to catch Him tripping, Jesus asked them whether it were lawful to heal on the Sabbath day. Suspecting some trap, perhaps, they kept silence. Then Jesus took the man and healed him, and let him go, and said to them, 'Which of you shall leave an ox or an ass fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the Sabbath day?' And still His enemies could find no words to answer Him, but could only look on in helpless, speechless malice.

Noticing how eagerly some of the guests pushed forward to secure the central seat of honour at the feast, Jesus, the greatest Guest among them all, began to

preach them a little sermon on humility. He reminded them how easily the man who pushed himself, unbidden, into the best seat, might be put to shame by being turned out of it again in favour of some more honoured guest. Pride and selfishness, He pointed out, did not always answer even among men; they certainly did not answer with God. It was God's way to abase the proud and to exalt the humble of heart. 'The road to the honours of Heaven,' He taught, 'passes at all times through the gate of humility.'

Jesus' host was probably a proud man himself, who loved to gather the rich and the well-to-do around him, in order to make a display of his wealth and hospitality. Perhaps this was the reason why Jesus now addresses a word of warning to him as well. He tells him when giving a feast not to invite his friends and relations and rich neighbours; they would feel bound to invite him in return, and he would get his reward. Let him rather invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind—those who could make him no return; that would be a really kindly and generous action, and God Himself would reward it at the last Great Day of Recompense.

These words of Jesus seem to have recalled to the mind of one of those present, the thought of the wonderful never-ending Banquet, which, an old tradition taught, would be given by Christ to the Jews, at His coming. 'Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God,' he said, no doubt in a very self-satisfied voice, as who should say, 'I am one of God's people, and there is sure to be a place for me at the Banquet, whoever else may not be there.' In reply, Jesus spoke the parable of the great supper.

There was a man, He said, who made a great supper and sent out invitations to many guests. When the

supper was ready, after the Eastern fashion he sent a messenger to summon the guests to his house. But they would not come; one made one excuse and one another: this man had bought a piece of ground, and wanted to go and see it; this other had bought five yoke of oxen, and was just starting out to try them with the plough, while a third had married a wife, and therefore professed not to be able to come.

Angry at this ungenerous behaviour on the part of his rich friends, the host opens his doors to an altogether different class of people.

The servant is sent out, first into the streets and lanes of the city, to gather in the poor, the sick, and the afflicted, and then, when there is found to be still room, into the highways and hedges, to seek out the veriest outcasts and beggars. At last the supper-room is filled. Every one who presents himself finds a welcome; only the first invited guests are shut out, and not allowed a taste of the supper.

Whether those to whom the parable was spoken understood its meaning, we do not know, but its meaning is clear enough to ourselves.

The giver of the banquet stands for God; the banquet itself is a picture of the blessings of the Gospel, those good things which pass all understanding, which God has prepared for those who love Him. The first invited guests were the learned classes, and religious teachers of the Jewish nation, while the messenger whom God sent to call them was Jesus Himself, who at His birth, as St. Paul tells us, took upon Him the form of a Servant. But the Pharisees and Sadducees, the chief priests and the scribes, would not accept the invitation Jesus came to bring them. Then said God to His Servant, 'Go into the streets and lanes of the city and gather together the

publicans and the sinners, the humble, the ignorant, and the despised'; and the Servant did so. There was no need of a second invitation; gladly was the call obeyed, and to the King's table come the rough fishermen of Galilee, the half-heathen men of Decapolis, Levi the tax-gatherer, Mary Magdalene, the woman of Samaria, and many another humble, repentant soul whom the world despised. And when there was still room—for God's Banquet Hall was built to take in all the world—north and south, east and west the message ran, and the despised Gentiles came crowding in. No longer is the message of salvation for the Jews alone. 'The Kingdom of God has become a Catholic Church, a resting-place, a feast of good things for all nations and languages and people and tongues.'

Leaving the Pharisee's house, with its well-spread table and throng of fashionable guests, Jesus sought once more the shelter of His humble lodging, where no rich carpets were spread upon the floor, and where none of higher rank than His twelve fishermen disciples ever entered.

By and by the publicans and sinners began to gather about His door with wistful, eager faces. Would Jesus not come out and give them some message of comfort and of hope?

One of the things which the Pharisees could not understand about Jesus was the way in which He treated these poor despised outcasts. He always had a kind word for them; He never seemed to think He was lowering Himself by mixing with them; He would even go so far as to eat at their tables. What could be the reason of His thus befriending and taking an interest in such people as these? Had they only known it, the reason was not far to seek. Jesus had the artist's eye;

He could see God's image in the most degraded, just as, beneath the rough-stained block of marble, the sculptor sees the pure white form of some lovely angel. It was not because He thought lightly of sin, but because He loved the sinner, that He took him by the hand. He wanted to raise him up, and give him a place among the children of God. Was it to be wondered at that the publicans and sinners were glad to welcome Jesus? He made them feel they were worth something; He filled their lives with hope, and gave them back their faith in God.

Seeing Jesus enter the crowd of outcasts, and begin to move among them with words of kindly welcome, the Pharisees and Scribes began to murmur and find fault. 'This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them,' they said in tones of disgust. It was in answer to this bitter speech that Jesus spoke three parables, all teaching the same lesson—God's boundless love for the wandering and the lost.

First of all He drew a picture of a shepherd feeding his flock in the wilderness. One evening, as the sun sinks behind the hills, a shepherd leads his flock into the shelter of the fold. On counting his sheep, he finds to his dismay that one of them is missing. Darkness is coming on, the wind is blowing in great gusts, and there is a mutter of thunder among the distant hills; but the shepherd does not hesitate. Wrapping his cloak around him, and taking his crook in his hand, he sets off in search of the strayed beast. He knows too well the dangers that beset it. The wilderness is wide, and there are thorns and briars upon the mountains. Many a lost sheep has been caught in a thicket before now, and kept a helpless prisoner until set free by death. There are high rocks and dangerous precipices besides, over which a

sheep may easily fall and be killed ; worst danger of all, perhaps, there is the snarling wolf-pack out upon the plain. The shepherd seems to see their eyes shining in the darkness like sparks of fire, and to hear the snap of their cruel, hungry jaws. Swiftly and silently he takes his way over the lonely hills. The stones and the briars cut and pierce his feet, the cold wind and the driving rain beat upon his head, but still he presses on, searching with his lantern every hill and hollow.

At last his heart gives a leap. There, drenched with the rain, and huddled at the foot of some rock, lies the lost sheep, more dead than alive.

There is no anger in the face of the good shepherd as he bends over the poor, foolish, defenceless creature—only the light of a great compassion. Tenderly he raises it, and, weary and footsore as he is, he bears it on his shoulders, back over the dark mountains to the sheltering fold. Then, in the greatness of his joy, he makes his way home, and gathering his friends and neighbours around him, he tells them the story of his weary search and its happy ending, and they all rejoice together over the lost sheep that has been found.

We can all see the meaning of this picture. In speaking of the shepherd upon the mountains Jesus was speaking of Himself. The parable of the lost sheep is a parable of His love for the lost sinner. When one of God's children falls into sin and follows evil and wicked ways, he is just like a lost sheep wandering away to its death upon the mountains. People like the Pharisees may say of such a one, 'What does it matter? One lost sheep, more or less, is of little count.' But there is One who thinks it matters, and that is Jesus ; it matters very much to Him. They tell the story of a father whose little lad had been stolen away by gipsies. 'What will



THE GOOD SHEPHERD

you do?' asked his friends. He replied, 'As long as I live I will go wandering up and down the world looking into the face of every boy I meet, until I find my own dear son.' Cannot we fancy that anxious father, with weary step and haggard face, wandering on and on in search of his missing child, never giving up the hope of finding him one day? With the same sorrowing heart and loving patience Jesus goes after the poor lost soul that has wandered away from God, upon the mountains of sin. He cannot rest until He has found His sheep. And when He has found it, O the joy that fills His heart! He has no reproaches to utter, no harsh treatment to mete out. Tenderly He stoops down, and with His strong arm He lays the lost sheep on His shoulder, and bears it safely home. And then all the bells of the City of God ring out, and the angels rejoice over one more lost one found.

And now Jesus speaks again, and the picture changes.

We see a woman busily at work, broom in hand, sweeping a room. She has lost a silver coin, one of a string of ten, which she wears as an ornament upon her forehead. The room, like most Eastern rooms, is but dimly lighted, so that, to aid her in her search, she has placed a lighted candle on the window-sill. The floor of the room, too, is deep in dust, being formed of dry beaten earth, so that the coin is hard to find. As the woman sweeps, the dust rises about her in clouds, but she does not heed it. Over and over the surface of the floor she goes, until at last there is a tinkle and a flash of silver and the coin is swept up. Bending down with a cry of joy, the woman seizes her precious silver piece. Holding it aloft in triumph, she rushes out to call her neighbours together, saying, 'Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost.'

It is the same lesson as the last, only presented in another form.

God, Jesus teaches us, is unwilling to lose one single soul created in His Image. Just as the woman in the parable set the greatest possible value on the coin that had dropped from her forehead, and had rolled away into some dusty corner of her house, so God sets the greatest possible value on the soul that has slipped out of His keeping, and is lying lost and useless amid the dust and rubbish of the world. Just as the woman and her neighbours rejoiced at the finding of the lost coin, so God rejoices when the lost soul is found, and His joy is shared by the holy angels in Heaven.

We know what gives the coin its value; it is the image of the king that is stamped upon it. It is just so with the soul; it is because it bears the image of the great King, God Himself, that its value is so great. A coin may be battered and defaced, it may be covered with dust and grime, but it never quite loses its value. So, however much the soul may be battered and defaced by sin, it is never worthless in God's eyes. There is always the hope that its former beauty and brightness may be restored, and the image shine out as at the first.

And now once more Jesus speaks, and once more the picture changes.

The parable of the lost sheep and the lost coin have shown us God seeking the sinner; now comes the parable of the prodigal son, to show us the sinner seeking God and being welcomed home by Him.

We seem to see a beautiful house, richly furnished, filled with troops of servants and surrounded by lovely gardens. It is the home of a father and his two sons. There is nothing remarkable about the elder son; he is a quiet, steady, young man, who has grown to be his

father's right hand, one whom he has learned to trust, and who has never given him a moment's trouble. The younger son, however, is of a different stamp. Hasty, greedy of pleasure, fond of taking his own way, he chafes at the restraints of his home, and longs to go out into the world. The older he grows, the more restless and unhappy he becomes, until at last he goes to his father and begs to be set free, and not to be kept any longer at home, like a bird in a gilded cage. 'Let me have now what you intend to leave me at your death, father,' he says, 'and let me be off.'

With a sigh his father grants his request. His loving heart is pierced by his boy's ingratitude, but he utters no reproach. 'He might have waited until my death,' he thinks to himself, 'but I will not stand in the way of his happiness; let him go, and may God bless the lad and bring him home to me again before I die.'

And so at the earliest possible moment, 'not many days after,' the younger son sets off to seek his fortune, and to taste the pleasures and the joys of the great world upon which he had set his heart. Away from his old home he speeds—as far as possible—until at last he reaches the far country of his dreams. There he begins to lead a life of pleasure and of sin. He has plenty of gold, and his gold brings him plenty of friends—of a sort. They drink his wine, they enjoy his banquets, they encourage him in all manner of rioting and excess. And so the days pass by, until he wakes up one morning to find he has spent all his money. Then his fine, fair-weather friends all disappear, having nothing more to expect from him, and he is left friendless and alone, 'a stranger in a strange land.' And now misfortune follows upon misfortune. A mighty famine arises in the land and he is brought to the very brink of starvation. Lower and

lower he sinks, until, in despair, he is forced to gain a living by feeding swine, the unclean, abominable animals, as the Jews thought them. That is the most bitter drop of all, in his cup of misery and degradation. Weak and faint, with starved look and hollow cheeks, he follows his swine through the forest, his only shelter at night the spreading forest boughs, his only food the fallen bean-pods from the trees.

At last he feels as if he could bear no more. Seated on some fallen trunk he buries his face in his hands. And then somehow he finds his thoughts straying away to the old home.

‘ Does the lamp still burn in my father’s house
Which he kindled the night I went away ?
I turned once beneath the cedar boughs,
And marked it gleam with a golden ray ;
Did he think to light me home some day ?

‘ Hungry here with the crunching swine,
Hungry harvest have I to reap :
In a dream I count my father’s kine,
I hear the tinkling bells of his sheep,
I watch his lambs that browse and leap.’ . . .

Ah, how the old memories pierce his heart ! What a fool he has been, what a miserable, ungrateful wretch, to behave as he had done to a father who had been so good to him. He sees his behaviour in its true colours at last—all his folly and vileness, all his ingratitude and sin. Oh, if he only dared to drag himself home to ask forgiveness, if his father would only take him back again, not as a son—that would be too much to ask—but as a hired servant, and so rescue him from his misery and pain ! Was it too late ? In a moment his mind is made up. ‘ I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, “ Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee,

and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.”’

And he arose and came to his father. That must have been hard work. It is always hard work to own oneself to have been in the wrong, and to have acted wickedly and foolishly, and the prodigal was in a far country, and he did not even know what kind of welcome he was likely to get at his father's hands.

As he trudged wearily along he would hear his old companions scoffing at him. ‘Ah, that is what it has come to at last! He has spent his father's money, and now he is going back to try what he can get out of him again.’ And as he drew nearer home, others would see him and frown, ‘That young spendthrift come back! How dare he show his face among decent people after the kind of life he has led?’ But still the poor, weary, tattered figure creeps on, in spite of jeers and scoffs and frowns. He is hungering for a sight of home and of his father's face; he cannot rest until he has poured out the story of his sin, and found forgiveness.

And now the old home comes in sight, and there in the distance he sees his father, but not before his father sees him. Day after day these many weeks past has that father gazed down the long road in the hope of his son's return, and here he is at last! Ragged, outcast, as the prodigal is, his father knows him, and instead of turning from him, or even waiting for him to draw near, he runs to meet him and falls on his neck and kisses him.

And then the poor prodigal finds his voice and makes his confession. His repentance is too real to let him keep that back. He does not say to himself, ‘If my father forgives me and is so glad to see me again, I need not humble myself before him nor ask his pardon.’ The thought of his father's goodness only makes his own sin

and ingratitude seem more black and grievous than before. 'O father, father, you are so good and kind, and I have been so selfish and ungrateful; and now, instead of upbraiding me as I deserve, you have loaded me with kindness. What have I done to merit such love—what did I do when I spurned and made light of it? I could bear it better if you were stern and punished me, but to treat me like this after all my bad conduct makes my guilt look blacker than ever. Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.'

But for answer the father only holds his dear lad the tighter in his arms. 'He has come back to me,' he says over and over again to himself, while his eyes brim over with happy tears. 'Bring forth the best robe,' he commands the servants, 'and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again: he was lost, and is found.'

And so we leave the prodigal in his father's arms. He has sinned deeply, but he has repented deeply too; and because of his repentance, the doors of the old home are flung wide open to receive him. Presently we watch him enter in, to the sound of music.

It would take too long to explain, step by step, the meaning of the parable (and I have not told it all), but indeed it is needless; the Heavenly meaning of the earthly story is plain enough. We can sum it up in four words—sin and suffering, sorrow and forgiveness. We have the sinner leaving God, we have God welcoming the sinner when he turns from his sin, and freely forgiving him all his evil past.



THE PRODIGAL SON

They tell of a young girl who ran away from home, and, like the prodigal, fell into evil ways. One night—it is a true story this—something drew her steps back to the home she had left. There was a light in the window. ‘I wonder if the door is open,’ she said to herself; ‘it always used to be closed fast at night.’ But when she tried the latch it lifted, and she found herself in the room where she had so often sat and listened to her mother’s pleadings. And she said, ‘I am here, I won’t go back, I will go a little further.’ So she roused her mother, and then, when they were talking about it afterwards—for she stayed in the old home—she said to her mother, ‘Mother, how was it that the door was open in the middle of the night, when you used always to be so careful to shut it?’

And the mother said, ‘Since you have been away that door has never been closed by night or by day, because I never gave up hope that you would come back.’

Just in the same way God keeps the door of pardon ever on the latch, in the hope that one or other of His wandering children may return.

It may be too late for everything else—it is never too late to come back to God.

XVIII

THE PARABLES OF THE UNJUST STEWARD, THE RICH MAN
AND THE BEGGAR, THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN
—JESUS BLESSES THE LITTLE CHILDREN—THE STORY
OF ‘THE GREAT REFUSAL’—THE PARABLE OF THE
LABOURERS IN THE VINEYARD

YOU remember that in the parable of the rich churl, Jesus taught how little earthly riches weigh in comparison with Heavenly treasure, and how foolish and shortsighted a thing it is to spend one's life in heaping up the one, while forgetting to seek the other. We now find Him, in another parable, teaching the right use of God's gifts of wealth and opportunity, and pointing out how even earthly treasure may bring a blessing with it, if it is only used unselfishly.

The story is that of a steward who played a wicked trick upon his master, and yet one which was so clever that his master could not help admiring him for it. This steward was a pilferer and a cheat, and had received notice to quit. Not knowing what to do for a living, he hit upon a clever plan. Calling his master's debtors together, he let each one off with a great part of the debt he owed, thinking to himself, ‘When I am turned out of my place, these people whom I have befriended will be grateful for the good turn I have done them, and will be glad to receive me into their houses.’

THE RICH MAN AND THE BEGGAR 273

It is possible, sometimes, to learn useful lessons even from worldly and wicked people, and Jesus bids us draw a lesson from the conduct of this steward. 'Make to yourselves friends out of the mammon of unrighteousness,' He says (and here 'mammon' stands for the god of wealth), 'that when ye fail they may receive you into everlasting habitations.' Each of you is a steward like the man in the parable; all you have, you hold in trust for God. Put then the earthly gifts which God intrusts to your care to good use; employ these in doing kind actions, in helping the poor, in making men happier and better, and leading them nearer God. In this way your gifts will bring you friends; the earthly treasure will turn to Heavenly gain. The loving deed, the kindly, generous act, will meet you again. It will become a friend, to welcome you at death into the shining and eternal tents of Heaven.

And then, as one more lesson of rebuke to the selfish life that uses all God's gifts simply for its own pleasure, and cares nothing for the suffering and the wants of others, Jesus spoke the parable of the rich man and the beggar.

There was once a rich man who had everything to make life pleasant. He lived in a splendid house 'ceiled with cedar and painted with vermilion,' and was clothed like a king in Tyrian purple and fine Egyptian linen. Surrounded by his friends, he passed his days in feasting and merry-making, drinking out of goblets of gold and eating of the choicest viands.

At the rich man's gate lay a beggar named Lazarus, sick, half starved, and covered with sores. Oh, how hungry he was! From where he crouched, he could catch a glimpse of the lighted rooms, and the long tables decked with flowers, and groaning beneath the weight of their silver dishes. If only the rich man would take pity

on him and send him a little food, even though it be some of his scraps, the veriest leavings from his plate! But the rich man has no scraps to waste on beggars. The only friends the poor man finds are the pariah dogs, outcast, hunted creatures like himself, who, in dumb compassion, lick his sores as he lies upon the ground. Could there be a greater contrast between these two men—the one so rich, flattered, and envied, and the other so poor, neglected, and miserable?

Ah, but wait a moment—

‘One second, and the angels alter that.’

There comes a day when the beggar dies. And now his sufferings are over. In his lifetime he served God, and now at his death God takes His servant to Himself. He who was once starved, deserted, and in pain wakes to find himself in the beautiful land of Paradise, where ‘they shall hunger no more neither thirst any more,’ and where ‘the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick.’

On the very same day the rich man dies, and men give his body a costly funeral. But his soul, what becomes of that? In that awful place, where lost souls dwell in untold misery and sadness, the rich man lifts up his eyes. Oh, what an awakening that is! Afar off are the pleasant fields of Paradise which he can never enter.

‘There he saw the meadows dewy
Spread with lilies wondrous fair,
Thousand thousand were the colours
Of the waving flowers there.

‘There were forests ever blooming,
Like our orchards here in May;
There were gardens never fading,
Which eternally are gay.’

There, too, is the beggar he had so lately spurned from his door, resting in Abraham’s bosom; and, with a

cry, the rich man stretches out his arms towards him, the one familiar figure amid all his strange surroundings. Oh, if Abraham could have pity on him and send Lazarus to his aid, to do something, however little, to help him in his misery! But Abraham answers that it cannot be. The rich man had made his choice and must abide by it; he was only reaping as he had sown. Lazarus could not come to his aid; a great gulf yawned between Paradise and hell which none could span. Then the rich man begs, if this be so, that the beggar may yet be sent on earth to his five brethren, who were living the same evil, selfish life that he had lived, to warn them of the doom of the unloving and the unmerciful. But Abraham sadly answers 'no,' once more. 'Your brothers,' he tells him, 'have the Holy Scriptures to warn them. If they do not believe God's word, they will not be turned even by the word of one who has risen from the dead.' And so the curtain falls on this strange, sad scene of the world beyond the grave.

Another parable which Jesus spoke about this time was meant as a lesson against self-righteousness. Again, as in the last parable, there are two men contrasted with one another, only this time it is a Pharisee and a publican.

It is the hour of prayer. The figures are seen climbing the marble steps which lead to the Temple. The one in front is clad in rich silken garments, and walks with head erect, and proud and scornful air. On his forehead and left arm he wears phylacteries of the very largest size, and the sacred fringes on his robe are very long and fine. No need to ask who he is; he carries the word 'Pharisee' written all over him. The man who walks behind is a publican. He is but poorly clad, and wears a timid, almost frightened air, as if he felt he was doing a daring thing in coming to God's House at all,

Both men enter through the Temple gate, both engage in prayer. Let us draw near and hear what they are saying. The Pharisee begins with thanking God. That seems a good beginning, only he does not thank Him for what he rightly owes Him thanks, for life, for health, for pardon of sin, and all God's other mercies. He gives thanks that he is such a good man, so much better than others, so much more honest, just, good living; so infinitely superior to that wretched publican, for instance, standing there by the door. 'I fast twice a week,' he adds proudly, 'I give Thee a tenth part of all I earn.'

Meanwhile the publican is standing 'afar off'; he dares not, like the Pharisee, draw near to the Holy Place; he feels unworthy even to tread the Temple Court. Hidden behind some marble pillar, with head bent in deep humility, he beats upon his breast, and in sad and broken tones his prayer goes up, 'God be merciful to me the sinner.'

It was quite a short prayer, but it came straight from the poor man's heart, and God heard it and answered it. The publican gained his request; he left the Temple pardoned and absolved, and with the peace of God at his heart. The Pharisee, on the other hand, gained nothing by his prayer—if we can call that a prayer which was only boasting. He wanted nothing from God, and so he gained nothing; he was rich in his own eyes, and so God sent him empty away. Such, Jesus reminds us, is ever God's way; the proud He humbles and lays low, whereas the humble He raises up and brings to honour.

As Jesus trod the narrow streets of Jerusalem, or wandered among the sunny uplands of fair Galilee, the mothers would often bring their little children to Him, in order that He might lay His hand upon their heads and bless them. And Jesus was always glad to do this.



JESUS BLESSING LITTLE CHILDREN

However sad and tired His face might be, it would always brighten up at the sight of children. He liked to have them round Him; to feel the touch of their little hands, and look into the bright and happy faces gazing up so trustfully into His own. Was it the memory of the little children of Bethlehem who laid down their lives for Him, when He Himself was a little child, that made Jesus look with such loving eyes on the children, and speak so tenderly about them, I wonder? It may have been so. At any rate, none had a warmer place in the heart of Jesus than the children; their innocence and purity came to Him like a breath blowing straight from the flower-land of Paradise.

One day, as He was, perhaps, seated wearily by the wayside, some of the Peræan mothers, who had heard that the famous Rabbi and Friend of little children was passing by, brought their little ones to Him that they might receive the touch of His holy hands. The disciples, however, took it ill that Jesus should be thus disturbed. 'The Master does not want to be troubled by children,' they said to the mothers; 'take them away.' But when Jesus knew it His eyes flashed with anger. 'Suffer the little children to come unto Me,' He said, 'and forbid them not, for of such is the Kingdom of God.' And He took them up in His arms and blessed them. O happy little children of 'the other side of Jordan,' to feel the hand of Jesus laid upon their heads and to hear those words of blessing! To which of us has not the thought come, which the children's hymn puts so well into words—

'I think, when I read that sweet story of old,
When Jesus was here among men,
How He called little children like lambs to His fold,
I should like to have been with Him then.

'I wish that His Hand had been placed on my head,
That His Arm had been thrown around me,
And that I might have seen His kind look when He said,
"Let the little ones come unto Me."'

Well, dear child, is it not a good thought to remember that Jesus is always the children's Saviour and the children's King? There is still a place, 'on the other side of Jordan,' where He takes up the little children in His arms, and carries them in His bosom—I mean the beautiful land of Paradise that lies beyond death's river. Whenever a little child dies, Jesus is there, standing ready to welcome him, and He takes His dear child up in His arms and blesses him, and never ceases to watch over and protect him through all the years to come.

And even here on earth Jesus often draws very near us. When His people meet together, it matters not whether in some grand cathedral, or little whitewashed village church, to celebrate the Sacrament of His Love, He, the King of Love, comes to make His abode in each penitent, believing heart. When a mother brings her baby to be christened, Jesus is there at the font to take the little child in His loving arms, and to put His hands in blessing upon it. So too, when we kneel at church, or by our bedside, Jesus is near to bless us. There is always the way of prayer open, by which children may approach Jesus and feel His loving touch. That is what the hymn goes on to remind us of—

'Yet still to His footstool in prayer I may go
And ask for a share of His love,
And if I thus earnestly seek Him below
I shall see Him and hear Him above,

'In that beautiful place He has gone to prepare
For all who are washed and forgiven;
And many dear children are gathering there,
"For of such is the Kingdom of Heaven."'

While in Peræa, Jesus received a message from Martha and Mary, telling Him that Lazarus, whom He loved, was sick. They did not ask Him to come to heal their brother; they seemed to have said to themselves, 'The Master loves Lazarus so dearly that when He hears he is ill, He is sure to come at once without any asking.' But Jesus did not come at once; after He had received the message He stayed two whole days in the place where the messenger met Him. It was His will that Lazarus should die, in order that by raising him to life again God might be glorified, and the hearts of the sorrowing sisters be filled in the end with a greater joy.

After two days He told His disciples that Lazarus was asleep, and that He was going to awaken him out of sleep, using the same tender word for death that He had used at the bedside of the little daughter of Jairus. His disciples did not like the idea of Jesus' going back to Judæa. They remembered how nearly He had been stoned in the Temple, and were fearful lest some mischief should befall Him. But Jesus told them that the sun of His earthly life had not yet begun to set. God had given Him a certain work to do, and a certain time to do it in; until His work was done no evil could happen to Him. So the little company turned their faces towards Bethany.

Just as they were starting, a young man came running towards them. His rich robes showed him to be a person of some importance—as indeed he was, for he was a ruler of the synagogue. Coming to Jesus, he knelt reverently at His feet, and put the question to Him in breathless, anxious tones: 'Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?' In answer, Jesus told him that the way to eternal life lay through the gate of God's commandments. He did not mean, of course, that the young ruler could earn eternal life by any good deeds

that he might do, He meant that it must be his aim to carry out God's will as far as God had revealed it to him, for that would be to put himself in the way of being taught the higher teaching which Jesus had come to bring him and all the world.

A shadow fell upon the young man's face as Jesus spoke; he thought that the Great Rabbi would have given him advice of a less familiar kind, that He would have pointed out some new and splendid way of gaining Heaven; but the commandments, why, he had kept them from his youth up! And so no doubt he had—in the letter; only, as Jesus had already taught in the Sermon on the Mount, it is not enough to keep the commandments in the letter, we must keep them in the spirit as well. God's commands reach beyond the outward act; they concern the very thoughts of the heart.

And yet, with all his ignorance of what God really required of him, there was something so earnest and sincere about the young ruler, there was so much that was good and noble in his character, that Jesus, beholding him, loved him. Would he have the courage to come over altogether to the side of God? Jesus determined to test him, 'Yet lackest thou one thing,' He answered, gazing at him with steadfast look: 'sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in Heaven: and come, follow Me.'

Here was the young ruler's chance. Oh, how eagerly must the angels of God have watched the struggle in his heart! Would he break away from the world and seek the true riches? Out of his gold would he make his crown? Alas, the test proves too severe! If it had only been something easier, something a little less impossible; but to give up everything to follow Jesus—all his money, his friends, his position—it was too great a sacrifice to

think of. With bowed head and sorrowful countenance the young man turns and goes away.

Have you ever stood at night upon the seashore when the moon has lighted her lamp of pearl, and flung a pathway of glory far over the quiet waters? If so, perhaps you have seen a passing ship glide out of the darkness, and for an instant stand out as distinctly before your eyes as though etched in black ink against a background of pure gold. The next moment it was gone, swallowed up by the darkness again. In some such fashion the young ruler comes before us in the story of 'the great refusal.' For a moment he comes under the light of Jesus' presence, and we see his face bright with love and longing; then he passes away into the darkness of separation from His Saviour, and we see him no more. Very sadly did Jesus watch the figure of the young man, who had run so eagerly towards him, now slowly disappearing into the distance. Turning to His disciples He once again pointed out the barrier that piled-up gold too often raises in the path of those who fain would climb the Heavenly way. 'It is easier,' He said, 'for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God.'

Perhaps by the needle's eye Jesus meant the little postern gate which in the East adjoins the main entrance into a walled town. It would be no easy task for a camel, with a great pack strapped upon his back, to pass through a little gate such as this.

So, Jesus seems to say, it is no easy task for a man to pass through the gate of the Kingdom of God, burdened and staggering beneath the weight of his money-bags. The gate of the Kingdom is low and narrow, and a man's riches are like the camel's pack, very likely to hinder and harass him, and in the end only too apt to block up his approach to God altogether.

St. Peter meanwhile, not without some little touch of pride, had been contrasting his own case with that of the young ruler. At the call of Jesus, neither he nor his fellow-disciples had hesitated a moment; they had given up everything to follow Christ. What was to be their reward, he wondered. 'Behold,' he said to Jesus, 'we have forsaken all and followed Thee; what shall we have therefore?' I think this question of St. Peter must have made Jesus sorry; He did not want people to follow Him with the idea of getting something out of His service. In reply, He told St. Peter of the reward God had in store for him and the others: hereafter they should share His glory, and, seated on twelve thrones, should judge the twelve tribes of the house of Israel. At the same time to teach him that God's rewards are not earned or deserved, but are freely given to whom He wills and as He wills, He spoke the parable of the labourers in the vineyard.

This is the picture. It is, let us imagine, 'the wine month,' and everywhere preparations are being made for the ingathering of the grapes. The vine leaves are beginning to turn colour, and the purple clusters they conceal are now fully ripe. Early one morning the owner of a vineyard starts out for the village market-place to hire labourers to cut his grapes. Having collected a band of these together, he sends them into his vineyard, promising to pay them each at the rate of one silver denarius, a coin the Bible calls a penny, and which in Jesus' day formed the ordinary daily wage of a labourer.

A little later on, at nine o'clock, again at twelve, then at three, and as late even as five o'clock in the afternoon, the owner visits the market-place, and finding at each of these times men out of work standing idly by, he engages them to work in his vineyard as well. With these men,

THE LABOURERS IN THE VINEYARD 283

however, he makes no bargain, 'I will give you what is right,' he says, and with this arrangement they are content.

By and by the sun goes down, and, their day's work being done, the master bids his steward call his labourers to receive their wages.

Those who came last are paid first; they get a silver denarius. 'Oh,' think the men who were first engaged, 'if those who have worked so little get so much, we who have worked hard all day will be sure to get much more!' But, when their turn comes, they too receive, each of them, a silver denarius.

They are inclined to grumble at this at first, as being unfair, but the owner of the vineyard points out that this was the exact sum he had agreed to give them. They really had no grievance; his money was his own, and if he chose to give to the other labourers the same wage as he gave to them, he was at perfect liberty to do so. 'So the last,' Jesus adds, 'shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.'

God, so I read the parable, is ever calling labourers out of the market-place of the world to work for Him in the vineyard of His Church. All who work for Him will get their reward; no one will be passed over. Only God gives as He sees fit; He alone is the proper judge of work and its reward. Moreover, there is a right way and a wrong way of taking service with Him. The wrong way is to work because of what we hope to get by our working; the right way is to work for God's sake and for the sake of the work itself.

No work of whatsoever sort that is done for God is ever forgotten by Him, but it does not follow that the work which seems to deserve most at His hands will always receive most at the end. The loving-hearted, un-

selfish labourer in God's vineyard, who only thinks how best he may please his Master and help his fellows, will be placed above him whose work, however grand and successful, is tainted, if ever so little, with selfishness. Let me learn then to do whatever work God gives me to do in the right spirit, to do it out of love for Him and for those around me. Do not let me ask, 'What reward shall I have from God?' but rather, 'What is the most I can do for Him?' That is the spirit in which the holy angels work, and gaining it I shall gain the joy of learning to do God's will on earth even as it is done in Heaven.

XIX

HOW JESUS RAISED LAZARUS FROM THE DEAD—CAIAPHAS
AND HIS PROPHECY—JESUS FORETELLS HIS PASSION—
THE BOON SALOME CRAVED FOR HER TWO SONS

JESUS was at the little village Bethabara, beyond the Jordan, when the messenger from Martha and Mary met Him. To get to the home of His friends He would have to travel some twenty miles. Thus, if He started in the cool of the morning, as He would probably do, He would reach the heights of Bethany well before the shades of evening had begun to gather.

Even before entering the village, the news met Him that Lazarus was dead, and had been carried to the grave four days before. In the East, burial usually took place within a few hours after death; and so it seems that Lazarus had died the very day when the messenger was sent to tell Jesus of his illness. It was in the very midst of the accustomed seven days of mourning for the dead that Jesus arrived. Secretly and quietly as He came, the tidings of His coming reached Martha as she sat weeping in her darkened, desolate home. The news was like a ray of light from Heaven. Rising to her feet, without even waiting to tell her sister, she at once started out to meet her Friend. Her heart seemed breaking with its load of sorrow. Oh, why had not Jesus come before? They had been looking for Him so long; they

had wanted Him so badly. Poor, pale-faced, broken-hearted Martha, how changed she seems from the busy, cheerful housewife who used so eagerly to welcome Jesus to her home! 'Lord,' are her first words as she sees Jesus, 'if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.' How sure Martha was of that! Jesus was so kind and pitiful, as well as so powerful and so strong. He would never have allowed His friend to die, if only He had come back in time. Now it was too late—O the bitterness of the thought! And yet, as she meets the compassionate gaze that Jesus turns upon her, a faint hope springs up in her heart that He would yet do something to roll away the burden of her misery. And so she adds, 'but I know that even now whatsoever Thou wilt ask of God, God will give it Thee.'

And then Jesus speaks. 'Thy brother shall rise again,' He says. Ah, but that was not the comfort Martha wanted! She thought Jesus was speaking of the day of Resurrection, and that seemed such a long way off. She wanted her brother back now; she wanted so much to see his dear face again, to touch his hand, to listen to his voice, to have the joy of waiting upon him once more. Sadly she answers, 'I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.' And then, once more, through the quiet evening air, the voice of Jesus sounds, and Martha hears those words whose music has carried hope and comfort to many a mourning, sorrow-laden soul all down the ages until to-day. 'I am the Resurrection and the Life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die.' 'Believest thou this?' He adds, and Martha answers, 'Yea, Lord: I believe that Thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.'

With these words, and with a new wild hope beating in her heart, Martha hastens home to her sister. Finding Mary sitting weeping silently with bowed head among her friends, she whispers in her ear, 'The Master is come, and calleth for thee.' In a moment Mary has risen to her feet. Hastily veiling herself she follows Martha, and together the sisters make their way to the place where Jesus is awaiting them.

The grave of Lazarus lay in the direction towards which they were hastening, and Mary's friends, who had come to mingle their tears with hers, seeing her go out, followed her, thinking she was going to the grave to weep there. But it was not her dead brother's grave that Mary wished to see, it was the living Jesus. Presently she finds herself in His presence, and falling at His feet she sobs out, 'Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.' They were the very same words that Martha had used. Over and over again, when alone together, the sisters had repeated these words, like some mournful refrain—'If only Jesus had been here, Lazarus would never have been taken from us.'

Very sad and pitiful was the look that Jesus bent upon weeping Mary. The sight of her suffering, the thought of all the misery and ruin sin had brought into the world, perhaps the knowledge that the miracle He was about to work, instead of softening, would only harden the hearts of His enemies towards Him, all affected Him very deeply. He groaned in spirit; a shudder passed over Him. 'Where have ye laid him?' He asked. 'Lord, come and see,' they said. Jesus wept.

The grave of Lazarus lay by the wayside. It was a chamber cut in the limestone rock, surrounded by flowering shrubs, and festooned by the creeping tendrils of the vine. A flight of steps led down into it, and its

entrance was closed by a heavy circular stone, which moved along a groove. As Jesus, with bowed head, walked slowly towards the grave, the friends of Martha and Mary could not help noticing the tears in His eyes, and the look of suffering on His face. 'See how much He loved him,' they whispered to one another; and some said, just as Martha and Mary had said, 'Ah, if Jesus had only come before! Surely the great Healer, who was able to give sight to a man born blind, would have had the power to ward off death from a friend He loved so dearly.'

At length the limestone cave is reached, in which the body of the dead man lies; and Jesus stands before the entrance. What is He about to do? What is going to happen? All stand looking at one another, waiting, wondering. Suddenly Jesus points to the stone. 'Roll it away,' He says. 'Oh no, not that!' We seem to see Martha in her agony, touching with beseeching gesture the border of Jesus garment. But Jesus only looks at her with steady, loving gaze, and bids her not be afraid. 'Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?' Then the strong arms of the disciples roll the stone along its narrow groove, and the dark mouth of the cave is disclosed. It is an awful thrilling moment. All hold their breath, and gaze fearfully into the gloomy recesses of the house of death. At last the silence is broken by the voice of Jesus. His eyes are lifted to Heaven; His lips are moving; He is thanking His Heavenly Father for having heard His prayer. Another moment, and with a gesture of command, and the voice of a mighty king, He cries, 'Lazarus, come forth,' and at His words the dead man stirs upon the rocky ledge where he lies; he rises to his feet, he comes slowly forward, swathed in

the linen clothes in which he had been laid to rest. Then Jesus speaks again, 'Loose him, and let him go'; and, freed from his grave-clothes, the man who was dead steps out once more into the world of living men, and Jesus gives him back to his sisters, who are weeping now for very joy and gladness of heart.

Such was the wondrous miracle by which the Lord of Life once more showed His power over death. An old legend tells us that Lazarus lived for thirty years after he had been raised from the dead. The Bible, however, says little or nothing about his after life. Did he ever speak of the wonderful country he had visited, whose confines lie beyond the grave and gate of death? Was he glad to return once more to the shelter of the quiet home of Bethany, or did his eyes for ever afterwards turn wistfully back to that better and more beautiful home from which the voice of Jesus had called him for a while? We do not know.

'Where wert thou, brother, those four days?
There lives no record of reply,
Which telling what it is to die,
Had surely added praise to praise.

'From every house the neighbours met,
The streets were filled with joyful sound,
A solemn silence even crowned,
The purple brows of Olivet.

'Behold a man raised up by Christ!
The rest remaineth unrevealed;
He told it not; or something sealed
The lips of that Evangelist.'

So wonderful a miracle as that of the raising to life of a man who had been four days dead, could not but make a deep impression on men's minds. The news ran

like wildfire through the village, and spread to Jerusalem. Presently the great council of the Jews, known as the Sanhedrim, was gathered together to consult as to what was to be done in the face of the growing excitement of the people. It was plain that Jesus was becoming a dangerous character; a few more such miracles, and who could foretell what would happen? The nation would be won over to believe on Him; it would rise and crown Him King; there would be fighting and rebellion; and then the Roman armies would be set in motion, the country and nation would be crushed, and their own few remaining privileges would be taken away.

So the Pharisees and Sadducees argued, with perplexed and scowling faces, and hearts full of bitter anger. Yet how to prevent all this from taking place? As they wrangle and dispute, suddenly a harsh, sneering voice makes itself heard above all the rest. It is the voice of Caiaphas the high priest. 'Ye know nothing at all,' he says, in tones of thinly veiled contempt, 'nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.' Death! yes, that was the one way out of the difficulty! As Caiaphas spoke every one saw that it was so. Jesus must die, His death was necessary in the interests of the people, the country, and themselves. Caiaphas did not dream what a deep truth he was uttering; he spoke out of the depths of his cruel, evil heart, but it was God's thought he was voicing for all that. It was indeed necessary that Jesus should die for the people, for only through His death could they escape the punishment of their sins, and be brought back to God. And not for the people of the Jews alone, was His death necessary, but for all mankind. It was God's plan that through the outstretched arms of His Son upon the Cross the whole world should

be redeemed, and Jew and Gentile be gathered together into one.

Jesus knew that the ruling classes had decided upon His death; but, though His time to die was now drawing very near, it had not yet actually come. Quietly therefore He withdrew from Bethany, and sought shelter in the little town of Ephraim, which lay in the wild hill country to the north of Judæa. There He remained with His disciples for a while, teaching them the holy lessons He would have them learn, and preparing Himself for His last great journey along the Way of Sorrows into the valley of the Shadow of Death.

It was now spring-time; the forest trees were beginning to clothe themselves in their dress of tender green, and the edges of the fields were bright with lovely flowers, whose colours, blue, white, purple, and scarlet vied with the splendid colours of the Temple Veil. Everywhere along the roads the caravans began to pass on their way to Jerusalem to keep the Passover.

Presently Jesus Himself and His disciples left the friendly walls of the little white town on the hill, and joined the stream of pilgrims to the Holy City. Jesus was going to His death; He knew it well. There at His journey's end, in black outline against the sky, the Cross spread its arms, and seemed to threaten Him; but He did not shrink or falter. He was going to give His life for the world; He was going to win man back to God; that was the thought which made Him set His face steadfastly to go up to Jerusalem, and to endure, with undaunted heart, the thought of the coming suffering and the shame. Onward with the step and bearing of a King He went, while His disciples as they followed Him wondered, and were afraid.

Did Jesus understand the dangers that threatened

Him? Did He know the malice and strength of His enemies, and the number of their plots? Surely He must know, and yet—how unafraid He was; there was a look almost of triumph on His face. What did it all mean?

Jesus noticed His disciples' perplexity. Calling them together, He began to tell them in plain words all that was about to happen to Him. Twice before He had spoken to them of His coming sufferings and death; once at Cæsarea Philippi, and once at the descent of snowy Hermon, the Mount of Transfiguration. Now again He told them the strange sad story of His Passion, only this time with even greater plainness than before. He spoke of His betrayal; He told them how He should be brought to judgement, and condemned to death; how He should be handed over to the Roman power, to be mocked and scourged, and nailed to the cross of shame; and how on the third day He should rise again. But His disciples did not yet understand. Jesus' words seemed only still further to bewilder them. Suffering, mockery, the Cross! what had these things to do with the King Messiah? Surely He must in the end triumph over His enemies, and set up the throne which should never pass away. The more they thought over Jesus' words, the less they understood them. 'This saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken.'

Soon after, an incident occurred which showed how difficult the disciples found it to rid their minds of their favourite dream of an earthly kingdom and its rewards. Among the company of those who followed Jesus in the way was Salome, the mother of James and John. Seizing her chance while Jesus was alone, she came to Him, in company with the two apostles, and, kneeling at His feet, asked a favour at His hands. Jesus

asked her what it was she wanted, and Salome answered a place of honour for her two sons in the kingdom He was about to set up. Might one of them sit on the right hand, and the other on the left, upon the first step of His throne at Jerusalem, as His chief officers? To their mother's prayer St. James and St. John added their entreaties as well. They wanted so much to be Jesus' right hand men, the nearest to their Master, the most trusted of all His ministers of state. But Jesus answered that they did not know what they were asking. Their thoughts were full of jewelled crowns, and thrones of ivory and gold; they did not understand that His only crown should be the thorn-wreath, and that His throne should be made of the hard wood of the Cross; they did not know that they were asking to fill the places of the two robbers who were afterwards to be crucified with Him. Could they drink of the chalice He was about to drink of, He asked them, and be baptized with the baptism that He was baptized with? It was the chalice of shame and reproach that Jesus meant, it was the baptism in the deep and bitter waters of suffering and of death of which He was speaking. St. James and St. John did not know this, and yet they felt that Jesus was somehow putting them to the test, that He was asking them if they were strong enough to bear something hard for His sake; and so they answered bravely, 'We are able.' And Jesus answered, 'Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized: but to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give, but to them for whom it is prepared of my Father.' These words of Jesus afterwards came true. Both St. James and St. John in after years were strengthened by God's Holy Spirit to drink of His cup and to pass through the

deep waters of His baptism. St. James, the first of the apostles to lay down his life for his Master, was slain by the sword; St. John, though he was not called upon, like his brother, to pass through the red sea of martyrdom, yet tasted the bitterness of loneliness and exile, being made a 'companion in tribulation' in the rocky isle of Patmos, 'for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.'

By and by a report of what James and John had asked of Jesus came to the ears of the disciples, and they were very angry. It seemed to them that Salome and her sons had been trying to get the better of them in an unfair and underhand way. Jesus, to teach them to think less about rewards for themselves, and more about the claims of others, called the twelve together, and told them not to follow the example of the Gentile heathen, who cared very much about ruling, but very little about the happiness of those whom they ruled. Let them rather seek to serve others by love. If they would rise very high, let them go down very low, even as He Himself had done. For even 'the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.' 'The real heights in human life,' it has been said, 'are the heights of self-forgetfulness and service. We are to use all our powers in doing good to others in Christ's name. That is what He did with His blessed life, and we are to follow in His steps.'

XX

THE BLIND BEGGAR OF JERICO—HOW ZACCHÆUS CLIMBED
INTO A TREE TO SEE JESUS—THE PARABLE OF THE
NOBLEMAN AND THE PIECES OF MONEY—MARY AND
HER BOX OF SPIKENARD

ON His way up to Jerusalem Jesus passed through Jericho, 'the city of palms.' The Jericho of to-day, travellers tell us, is a mere cluster of miserable Arab huts, but in Jesus' day it was a famous trading centre, and one of the most beautiful towns in Palestine. It lay on the great caravan road that ran between Damascus and Jerusalem, in the midst of a green well-watered plain, 'the very fairyland of the old world.' It was a city of trim, well-built houses, of silver streams, of palm groves, and rose gardens. Above all it was famous for its plantations of balsam, whose sweet scent everywhere filled the air, and gave it the name of 'the city of fragrance.'

There was a beggar-man sitting by the roadside, the day that Jesus passed by. His name was Bartimæus. Poor, friendless, and in want, it was his daily custom to grope his way from the city walls, and sit and beg of the pilgrims who passed by on their way to the Holy City. Beautiful were the palm-trees that waved by the roadside where he sat; fair in the distance sprang the spires and towers of 'the city of roses'; but Bartimæus saw nothing of the beauty of the scene that lay before him,

for he was quite blind. There he sat in his tattered garments day after day, wrapped in darkness as in a cloak.

To-day, however, God's hand pours sunshine into his life. As he sits with outstretched hand and vacant face, suddenly he hears in the distance a sound as of the tramp of advancing feet. There is a crowd coming along. As it draws nearer he can hear the hum of excited voices, and as he listens he begins to grow excited himself. 'Who is it?' he asks. 'What is the matter?' The passers-by tell him that it is Jesus of Nazareth who is passing by. Jesus of Nazareth! why that must be the great Prophet who a few days ago raised a dead man to life at Bethany; that must be the Jesus of whom he himself has so often dreamed as coming to him one day, and laying His hand on his poor, sightless eyes, and saying, 'Bartimæus, receive thy sight!'

'Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy upon me!' he cries, and even as he speaks the crowd surges past. His cries redouble. Hard, unkindly voices bid him cease his clamour, but he takes no heed of them. The more the crowd bids him be silent, the more earnestly he makes his appeal for help. Jesus hears his pitiful cry, and it touches His compassionate heart. He stands still and commands the blind beggar to be brought before Him. 'Be of good comfort, rise, He calleth thee!' comes the message, and the blind man staggers to his feet. His long cloak entangles him—he casts it from him; friendly hands seize him, and he is half led, half pushed, into Jesus' presence.

'What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?' comes Jesus' voice, as the beggar stands trembling before Him, and the blind man answers with tears, 'Lord, that I might receive my sight.' And Jesus says, 'Receive thy

sight,' and the beggar looks up, and, O God, he sees! There are the waving trees, the blue sky, the dusty road, the wondering, excited faces hemming him round. It is all true, it is no dream. Above all, bending over him, is the face of Jesus. One glance at that face and the beggar's swift resolve is taken. He follows Jesus in the way.

'And wert thou, Love, so near me then?
I heard Thy name on lips of men,
I felt the crowd, the laden air—
I knew that something great was there.

'The thickly trampling feet I heard,
And robes that brushed, and limbs that stirred;
The dust upon my lips lay dry,—
The crowd thronged on: *Thou* passedst by!

'And I could see no face, no form;
I felt the sun above me warm;
I asked—I know not whom—to say
Who passes, 'mid that throng to-day?

"'Jesus!' I cried, nor would forbear;
"Thou Son of David, hear my prayer;"
And yet I never thought that He
Would stop, would call, would speak to me.

'Men led me—drew me—to His side:
I felt the buzzing crowd divide;
Then came a voice I could not dread—
"What wilt thou I should do?" it said.

'Oh, might I, Lord, receive my sight!—
He spake one word, and all was light!
A dazzling glow, that on my brain
Rushed like a golden shower of rain!

'Ay, there were men there! that I knew,
A shifting scene of every hue;
I *saw* them not: I could but see
Thy face, O Love, bent down to me!

.

'How oft with staff and groping hands
I've felt my way through darkened lands,
Nor knew His footsteps (though divine)
Were treading very earth like mine !

'How oft I've felt the sunbeam glow,
Nor knew its glory lit His brow !—
How oft I've felt the nightly air,
Nor thought 'twas laden with His prayer !

'O Love,—so near and yet unknown !
O Face,—a man's face, like our own !
And wert Thou then so close, . . . and I
Sat begging for a crust hard by ?'

(ELIZABETH WORDSWORTH.)

A little further on, and Jesus met with a rich man who came over to His side, drawn like Bartimæus by the sight of His face and the magic of His loving words. His name was Zacchæus; he was chief of the large colony of tax-gatherers who were stationed at Jericho to collect the dues arising from the balsam trade. He, too, was familiar with the name of Jesus, and had long desired to see Him. He was sitting in his custom-house, when he heard a rumour that Jesus was approaching the gates of the city, and he at once started forth to try to catch a glimpse of Him. Now Zacchæus was a little man, and he soon found that there was small chance of his seeing Jesus, on account of the press. And so, running a little way ahead, he climbed up into the spreading branches of a wild fig-tree that overhung the road by which Jesus must pass into the city, and there awaited His coming.

By and by the crowd drew near, and Zacchæus, peering from behind his leafy screen, eagerly searched the faces of the crowd to discover Jesus. He thought himself quite unnoticed, but there was One who noticed him. Jesus,

as He passed beneath the tree, looked up, and called the publican by his name. 'Zacchæus,' He said, 'make haste and come down, for to-day I must abide at thy house.'

Surprised and overjoyed, Zacchæus at once descends, and stands humbly before Jesus, awaiting His commands. The crowd exchange wondering glances with one another. What did Jesus mean? Did He know that this man, to whose house He had invited Himself, was a hated publican? Why, if the Prophet needed shelter, did He not seek it in the house of some priest or Levite, or at any rate of a person with some claims to respectability?

But Jesus pays no heed to the loud murmurs of the crowd. It was not the first time that He had willed to be the guest of a man who was a sinner. Quietly He withdraws Himself from the throng, and follows Zacchæus to his home.

Ah! that was a happy day for the rich publican that saw Jesus, 'the Friend of sinners,' an honoured guest beneath his roof. As he looked into Jesus' eyes and listened to the music of His wise and tender words his heart was strangely moved. In the light of that holy presence he saw his past life in its true colours, and it became hateful to him; he thought with shame upon all the fraud and trickery and oppression of which he had been guilty. God help him! he would try to make amends for his past, he would try to lead a nobler, better life henceforth; if only for the sake of the compassionate Saviour who had taken him by the hand and called him 'friend.'

'Behold, Lord,' he says, standing with bowed head before Jesus, 'the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation I restore him fourfold.'

As Zacchæus speaks we seem to see Jesus' eyes kindle

with a new and loving light. 'This day,' He says solemnly, 'is salvation come to this house, forso much as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.'

Leaving fair Jericho, girdled about with its palm-trees and rose gardens, Jesus and His disciples mingled once more among the crowd of pilgrims, who, with music and singing, were making the ascent of the wild and rocky gorge which wound along uphill all the way to distant Jerusalem.

By and by, as they drew nearer to the city, and the crowd around their Master began to grow denser, thoughts of His coming triumph began once more to fill the disciples' minds. In a dream they seemed to see the throne of ivory and gold set up, and their Master heaping His rich rewards upon them, His chosen ministers of state. Jesus read His disciples' unspoken thoughts, and in answer to them He gave them the parable of the nobleman and the pieces of money.

There was a certain nobleman, He said, who went into a far country to receive a kingdom for himself, and to return. (As they listened to Jesus' words the disciples would remember that this was what two noblemen, Herod the Great and Archelaus his son, had actually done. Both these kings, at different times, had travelled from Jericho to far-off Rome to receive their crowns at the hands of the Roman Emperor, and to return.) Before starting, Jesus went on, the nobleman called together ten of his servants and gave each of them a sum of money, known as a mina, worth about three pounds of our coinage, bidding them trade with it while he was away. But the citizens hated him, and sent an embassy after him saying that they would not have him as their king.

After a while the nobleman returned home, having received his kingdom. Calling his servants together he bade them give an account of their stewardship. Then the first servant came, and lo, his hands were full of gold ! He had turned his lord's mina to such good account that he had increased it tenfold. 'Well, thou good servant,' said his master in kindly tones, 'because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities.' And then a second servant came, and in like fashion showed gold and silver pieces five times as many as he had received, and he too was rewarded for his industry by being set over five cities.

At last came one with sullen, half-frightened air, and stood before his master. 'Lord, here is the money you gave me—I have kept it safely wrapped up—I did not dare to touch it, because I was afraid of you. You are so hard, taking up what you laid not down and reaping where you did not straw.' And at these unjust and insolent words, the king's eyes flashed with anger. 'Wicked servant,' he answers, 'I judge you out of your own mouth. Why, if I was the kind of master you describe me, hard, grasping, and severe, did you not pay my money into a bank so that I should at least have had it returned to me with interest? Take away his one mina,' he adds sternly, turning to those who stood by, 'and give it to the man with ten. For I say unto you, that unto every one that hath shall be given, and from him that hath not, even that which he hath shall be taken away from him.' Then comes the awful sentence pronounced over his rebellious subjects, 'But those mine enemies, which would not that I should rule over them, bring hither, and slay them before me.'

In this story of the nobleman and his servants Jesus was drawing a picture of Himself and His disciples.

The far-off country, of which the parable speaks, stands for the far-off land of Heaven whither He was so soon to take His journey, in order to be crowned by His Father with kingly power and authority over His Church. The day was coming when He should return to His Kingdom again in triumph and great glory; only, between His going away and His coming back a long stretch of years must intervene. The present time therefore for His disciples was the time for working, not for receiving rewards, for serving not reigning. Only at the King's return would the reckoning be made. Then the faithful servant should receive his due reward, while the idle and unfaithful should suffer loss. Then, too, the King's enemies—those who would not acknowledge His rule or bear His yoke—should meet the awful doom of destruction. 'For He must reign until He hath put all enemies under His feet.'

The road to Jerusalem led by Bethany. It was growing dusk, and Jesus was glad to rest for a while in the little village which was endeared to Him by so many happy memories. There in the house of His friends He remained all that night. The next day was the Sabbath, and in the evening a supper was given in His honour. It took place in the house of a man named Simon, who had been a leper, and whom perhaps Jesus had Himself healed.

Let us in thought enter with Jesus into Simon's home. The dining-room is bright with lights and gay with flowers, and its floor is spread with carpets of many colours; couches are ranged around the low, gaily-painted table, and the guests are already taking their places. There, foremost to greet the Master, is Martha. She has been busy all the evening in helping to set out the table, to arrange the dishes, and to cook the food. There is

Lazarus — grave, silent, dreamy-eyed — a man who has looked upon the spirit world, and upon whom the other guests keep turning furtive, wondering glances. There is Mary, with her flower-like face and low gentle voice; so happy at the thought of taking her place once more at Jesus' feet. As we look on, we see Jesus conducted to the place of honour at the host's right hand. How eagerly His every want is provided for; with what earnestness the assembled guests hang upon His words!

At length the evening meal nears its end. And now Mary, her gentle heart brimming over with love and gratitude, prepares to make her great thank-offering to Him who has poured back joy and peace into her once empty, desolate home. Bearing in her hands a jar of alabaster, filled with oil of spikenard, 'very precious,' she comes from behind, and breaking the jar's narrow neck, she pours the costly ointment first on the head and then over the feet of Jesus, as He reclines upon His couch. Then stooping down she wipes His feet with the long tresses of her hair, just like Mary of Magdala, while the odour of the ointment fills the whole house with its delicious fragrance.

To anoint the feet even of kings was at this time an unheard-of thing. Amid all the pomp and extravagance of pagan Rome, we are told, no such tribute had ever been paid to an emperor. It is not surprising therefore that at the sight the assembled guests should gaze at one another in wonder, and begin to whisper among themselves. Presently a grating voice is heard speaking out what many are only thinking, 'Why was this waste of the ointment made? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred silver pence, and have been given to the poor.' Strange! it is the voice of one of Jesus' own disciples, Judas Iscariot.

Judas was the purse-bearer of the little band of the disciples, and it was gall and wormwood to him to see so costly a gift thrown away, as it seemed, in so careless a fashion. His fingers itched to have the handling of the silver pieces of which he spoke. It was not the poor he was thinking of. Love of money, like some evil, poisonous growth, had begun to twine about his heart, until it had choked all that was best and noblest in his character, and he had even sunk so low as to become a thief, and to steal the money committed to his charge.

Poor, miserable, unhappy Judas! Even now the hideous plan of selling his Master into the hands of His enemies for money was slowly shaping itself in his mind. Jesus' oft repeated words about His sufferings and death had at last convinced him that after all there was to be no triumphal setting up of the Kingdom at Jerusalem, and therefore no crowns and rich rewards to be given away. All his pleasant dreams of power and glory and a high place were fast vanishing into air. He felt desperate with the sense of the wrong that had been done him. Cheated and betrayed as he felt himself to be, it only remained for him to snatch what he could out of the ruin which was so swiftly coming on.

Jesus, meanwhile, had marked the whispering and the looks of disapproval that were being bent upon Mary, and His voice, which was always lifted up on behalf of the weak and oppressed, is now raised in her defence. 'Why trouble ye her? He asks. She hath wrought a good work on Me. For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but Me ye have not always. She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying. Verily, I say unto you, wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also

that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.'

And so Mary's devotion met with its reward. Little did the guests at Simon's supper imagine how wonderfully the words of Jesus should be fulfilled. They did not dream that the simple story of a woman's devotion should go into all lands, and its sound unto the ends of the world. Yet so it was to be. The fragrance of Mary's loving gift was never to die. It lingers yet. Still whenever the story of the anointing at Bethany is told, the House—the Church of Jesus—is filled with the odour of the ointment.

BOOK III

THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW

‘ As I was going to Bethlehem-town,
Upon the earth I cast me down
All underneath a little tree,
That whispered in this wise to me,
“ Oh, I shall stand on Calvary,
And bear what burthen saveth thee !”

.

‘ Again I walk in Bethlehem-town,
And think on Him that wears the crown.
I may not kiss His feet again,
Nor worship Him as I did then ;
My King hath died upon the tree,
And hath outpoured on Calvary
What blood redeemeth you and me !’

I

HOW THE KING ENTERED JERUSALEM IN TRIUMPH—THE
FRUITLESS FIG-TREE—THE SECOND CLEANSING OF THE
TEMPLE—THE LITTLE SINGING CHILDREN—THE QUES-
TION WHICH WAS PUT TO JESUS IN THE TEMPLE AND
HOW HE ANSWERED IT—THE PARABLES OF THE FALSE
SON, THE WICKED HUSBANDMEN, AND THE WEDDING-
FEAST

It was the last week of Jesus' earthly life. We think of Him as of a traveller who has long been climbing the rugged side of some great mountain. The sun is going down as he gains the summit. In a moment we see his figure outlined against the evening sky, the next he slowly descends into the gathering shadows on the other side, and is gone.

Three-and-thirty years had passed by since Jesus, as a little Child, had begun to climb life's rugged hill, and now its top was reached at last. As He looked back He could see the path by which He had come. There at the very foot of the hill lay Bethlehem's thymy dale; there the little flower city of Nazareth with its carpenter's shop. How far away it all seemed! How full of pain and disappointment the journey had been! With a sigh we seem to see Him turn away. The sun sinks; He goes down into the valley of the shadow.

Jesus' last Sabbath night on earth had been spent at

Bethany, and now, as the sun's rays touched to gold the misty summits of the eastern hills, He left Bethany and set out once more for Jerusalem.

Early as it was, the streets of the little village were full of people. The caravans, as they passed on their way to the Holy City, had spread the news that the Prophet of Nazareth was on His way to keep the Passover, and many of the inhabitants had come out to meet Him and to escort Him back in triumph.

There was a little hamlet called Bethphage (or the House of Green Figs), which lay on the way to Jerusalem. As they drew near this village Jesus sent on two of His disciples, telling them that in the village street they would find an ass tethered, with an untrained colt at her side. These they were to untie and bring to Him. Should the owner question them as to what they were about, they were to answer, 'The Lord hath need of them,' and the man—himself no doubt a disciple of Jesus—would be satisfied.

Jesus did not intend to enter Jerusalem secretly—there was no need now for concealment—He claimed His right to ride into the city in royal fashion, just as the Jewish kings and prophets of old had done.

Many hundreds of years before, the prophet Zechariah had written, 'Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: He is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.'

To-day the King was coming as it had been told.

The two disciples found the ass with the colt by its side just as their Master had said, and they brought them to Jesus. Spreading their garments upon the colt's back, they set Jesus upon it, and, surrounded by the crowd, He began to ride slowly on towards Jerusalem.

News of His approach had been carried to the city, and fresh bands of pilgrims had by this time arrived from Jerusalem, bearing palm branches in their hands. Every moment the crowd grew larger. Some with eager hands began to tear down boughs from the olive-trees that bordered the road, and to strew their silver leafage before Him, others to unloose their long coloured cloaks and to spread them upon the ground as a carpet for the ass's feet.

The road from Bethany to Jerusalem wound over the Mount of Olives. As the procession rounded the hill, those in front caught their first glimpse of the city, and in an instant the cry of 'Hosanna' (the 'Save now I beseech Thee' of David's 118th Psalm) began to be raised. Immediately a thousand voices took up the strain, 'Hosanna'; 'Hosanna to the Son of David'; 'Blessed be the King that cometh in the Name of the Lord.'

There were a number of Pharisees in the crowd, drawn to follow Jesus perhaps by curiosity. Not acknowledging Him to be the Christ themselves they were vexed that others should do so. 'Master,' they said, 'rebuke Thy disciples.' But Jesus refused to rebuke them. It was their right to offer, and His pleasure to accept their homage. 'I tell you,' He said, 'that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out.'

And so with thanksgiving and the voice of melody the procession swept on its way. And now the road dipped down, and the towers of Zion disappeared, and now once more it rose, and the whole city burst upon the view. There it lay, the city of the Great King, in all its grandeur and loveliness; the white walls and golden pinnacles of its Temple glittering in the sun, its shining

spires and mighty towers thrusting themselves high into the air, against a background of pure blue sky.

At the sight, once more the forest of palm branches are waved, and glad shouts of 'Hosanna' rend the air. Only Jesus is silent. As He gazes on the fair scene spread at His feet, the tears begin to gather in His eyes, and He breaks into a passionate cry of grief.

'If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace, but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.'

That must have been a strange sight to the crowd, Jesus weeping over the beautiful city whose splendour filled their hearts with joy. But ah, Jesus could see a sight they could not see! Soon He knew Jerusalem should be destroyed. Already He could see the Roman eagles planted on the city walls, the smoking ruins of the Temple, and the streets running red with Jewish blood. He could see the forest of crosses being set up round the city, and the long, endless line of captive Jews led away to slavery. Above the shouting and the hosannas of the multitude His ear heard the fierce clash of arms, and caught the sad cry of the wounded and the dying, and the wail of the bereaved. He was looking into a valley of death.

Yes, Jerusalem was a doomed city. God had given it many chances, but it would not take them; Jesus had again and again called it to repentance and brought it the



THE ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM

offer of salvation, but it would not listen. And now the sands of God's patience had begun to run out.

'As we listen to these words of Jesus, the picture of some mournful sunset seems to rise to view. The bright red sun is slowly sinking—sinking behind the western hills. The day has been long and bright, but it is almost over. Shadows all around are lengthening; soon it will be quite dark. All around are voices whispering in the air, 'Too late! too late! too late! for many have wasted those golden hours and they can never come again.'

And now the long procession winds its way down the mountain-side, through the Garden of Gethsemane with its olive thickets of silver-grey, over the bridge that spans the Brook Cedron, and up the zig-zag path on the other side of the valley, to the city gate. By this time all Jerusalem is astir. As the crowd sweeps on, with the sound of shouting and the waving of palm branches, every latticed window, and every roof along the narrow streets through which it passes, is alive with eager, excited faces. The smith throws down his hammer, the potter leaves his jars; the jeweller, the brazier, the weaver, with their wives and little children, all come crowding to their doors. 'Who is it?' they ask one another as Jesus rides by, half-hidden by a sea of waving palms; and the answer comes clear and ringing from the lips of the rejoicing multitude, 'This is Jesus, the Prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.'

And so the King came to His own City.

As the procession reached the foot of the Temple hill, or 'the Mountain of the House' as it was called, it began to disperse, for there was an unwritten law which said, 'Let no man go on the Mount of the House with his staff, shoes, or purse, or with dust on his feet.'

Left to Himself, Jesus ascended the hill and entered

the Temple Court. There, to His grief and indignation, He saw the same scene repeated which had so aroused His anger at His first Passover. Once again 'greed had won the battle against reverence.' The army of money-changers were back again in their old places. The beautiful cloistered walks were full of cattle and sheep, and the old sounds of wrangling and chaffering and violence filled the air.

For awhile Jesus stood looking on at the scene of riot and confusion; then He turned and went slowly out.

By this time the shadows of evening had fallen, and the streets of the city were beginning to twinkle with a myriad tiny lights. Followed by His disciples, Jesus once more made His way to the city gate, and with sad and weary step retraced the road to Bethany.

The next day, in the grey dusk of the early morn, He again set out for Jerusalem. Beneath a star-lit sky He had passed the night in prayer and fasting. Now the morning had come He began to feel the pinch of hunger. There were fig-trees growing among the olive-trees that bordered the dusty road. It was not the time for figs, yet as Jesus passed by He caught sight of a tree which seemed to give promise of fruit. In the fig-tree the leaf is often the sign of good fruit below, and this particular tree was decked with a profusion of leaves. And so Jesus went up to it expecting to find some early-ripe figs upon it, or at least some remains of the last year's violet-coloured fruit.

But when He parted the spreading branches He found no sign of any figs. The tree was quite barren. With all its show of leaves it was a poor deceptive, worthless thing, fit only to be hewn down and cast into the fire. Then Jesus said, 'Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever,' and at His words we seem to see a shiver

pass through the tree, and presently it begins to droop and die.

It was not, of course, with the idea of punishing a senseless tree that Jesus spoke these words, but rather to preach His disciples a solemn sermon against the danger of a fruitless religion. It was His way of warning them of the fate in store for those who seem to be what they really are not, and who, under the leaves of a fair profession, conceal a wicked or a worthless life. The fig-tree was really a picture of the Jewish nation. Jesus had already spoken of that nation under the figure of a fig-tree planted in a vineyard, which bore no fruit and was thus in constant danger of being cut down.

God had set His people in a secure and sheltered place; He had hedged them round, and done His best in every way to promote their growth in holiness, but all in vain. Over and over again He had come seeking fruit on His fig-tree and had found none. There were plenty of leaves, plenty of profession, much outside show, but no fruits of righteousness. Now had come the time for judgment. The tree must disappear. Already the sentence had gone forth: 'Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever.'

Jesus' anger was still burning fiercely against the usurers and hucksters who had dared to carry on their unholy traffic in His Father's House. No sooner did He reach Jerusalem than He went straight to the Temple and began, as He had done before, to drive out the sheep and oxen, to scatter the tables of the money-changers, and to overturn the seats of the sellers of doves. So jealous was He of the honour of God's House that He would not even allow a vessel to be carried through the Court. 'It is written,' He said, and as He spoke His eyes were as a flame of fire, 'My House

shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a brigands' den.'

'And the blind and the lame came to Him in the Temple,' St. Matthew tells us, 'and He healed them.'

It was perhaps while He was laying His hands on these sick, friendless folk, with the old look of tenderness and pity once more upon His face, and the leaping flame of anger in His eyes now quite gone, that a number of children came trooping by. They were the little Temple chorister boys, perhaps on their way to practise the psalms which they helped to sing at the grand Temple services. Catching sight of Jesus they stopped and came crowding round Him. Surely this was the Great Prophet who had entered Jerusalem in triumph yesterday. They had seen Him as He rode past in the streets. What a splendid sight it had been! How like a king He had looked! He was like the pictures they had seen of Joshua, the captain of the hosts of Israel, or David with his royal sceptre and crown of gold. No wonder the people had cheered Him, and waved their palm branches as He passed along. And then their sweet childish voices began to raise the cry they had heard the pilgrim's chant, as Jesus entered the city, 'Hosanna to the Son of David,' and then again 'Hosanna,' until the Temple cloisters rang again.

Very tender, very loving, was the look which Jesus turned on these little Jewish singing boys. It pleased Him to hear their praises. To have the children on His side, to know that they at any rate loved Him dearly, this made up for much. But there were some to whom the children's hosanna gave no pleasure. There were a number of richly-dressed, supercilious-looking Scribes and Pharisees standing by, and as they listened their faces darkened. 'Hearest Thou what these say?' they

asked Jesus angrily; and He answered, 'Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise?'

With the sound of the children's voices still ringing in His ears, Jesus now left the Temple, and the twilight beginning to fall, He passed out of the city and over the Mount of Olives, on His way to Bethany.

Early the next morning He set out with His disciples for Jerusalem. Presently they passed the fruitless fig-tree of the day before, and lo! there it stood in the grey morning light—a dead thing, withered to the very roots.

'Master,' cries St. Peter with awed voice, 'behold the fig-tree which Thou cursedst is withered away!' And then 'the word of judgment becomes a word of promise.' Jesus tells the apostles that with faith it would be possible for them to do works even more wonderful than this. There was nothing the prayer of faith could not accomplish; there was no work too mighty for it to do. The man with a firm faith in God's power and love could even remove mountains.

On entering the Temple Jesus found a great crowd anxiously awaiting His coming, and, taking His seat among them, He began to teach them.

Scarcely had He begun His lesson, however, than He was interrupted by the arrival of a procession of rulers and learned men, whom the great Council had sent to confront and crush Him. On they came, sweeping along in their rich robes and broad fringes to their garments, and, standing in a half-circle around Jesus while the people respectfully gave way before them, they asked Him by what right He had taken upon Himself the office of teacher. 'By what authority doest Thou these things? and who gave Thee this authority?'

It was quite a fair question. Every Jewish teacher

sat at the feet of some older Rabbi, and when he was thought fit to teach others he was solemnly set apart for his work; if a scribe he was ordained, and received a key, so some say, as a sign that he was entitled to unlock the treasures of knowledge to the people.

Now Jesus had been ordained and set apart as Teacher by the highest of all authorities, even God Himself; and He held in His hand the golden key which was able to unlock all the treasures of earthly and Heavenly wisdom; but He did not tell His questioners this. He knew they had only asked their question in the hope of entangling and confusing Him, and putting Him to shame before the people. And so He only answered quietly, 'I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, whence was it? from Heaven, or of men?' At His words there was a dead silence. Scribe and Doctor looked at one another, and knew not what to say. They could not answer 'from Heaven,' for that would simply be to acknowledge that St. John's teaching was true, and St. John had borne record that Jesus was the Son of God. They dared not answer 'of men,' for St. John was the nation's hero, and they were afraid to belittle him lest they should provoke the anger of the very people whom they were trying to detach from Jesus' side. And so, like cowards, they took refuge in the plea of ignorance. 'We cannot tell,' they said; when swiftly came Jesus' answer, 'Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.'

Having thus turned the tables upon His adversaries, Jesus went on to speak three parables, to which they were forced to listen with feelings of growing uneasiness and anger. These were the parables of the false son, the wicked husbandman, and the wedding-feast.

‘A certain man,’ He said, ‘had two sons, and he came to the first and said, “Son, go work to-day in my vineyard.” But his son answered roughly and said, “I will not”; but afterwards he was sorry for his disobedience and went. The second son answered in quite a different fashion. He was as courteous and plausible as his brother had been rough and boorish. “I go, sir,” he said—and never went at all!’

Now which of these two, asks Jesus, did the will of his father? Of course there could be but one answer, ‘The first.’

Then Jesus, turning to the crowd of proud Pharisees and haughty Doctors, bade them see in the false, smooth-spoken son a picture of themselves. The publicans and the sinners had broken God’s laws and refused Him their obedience, but they had repented at the preaching of St. John the Baptist, and had begun to set their feet bravely in the way of God’s Commandments; but they—the leaders of religion—had never really turned to God at all. They had made a great parade of obedience, there had been much pretence of service on their part, but it was all outside show. They were like the people of whom Isaiah writes, ‘This people honoureth me with their lips but in their hearts they are far from me.’

How Jesus’ words must have stung His hearers; but He had not done with them yet. As they stand listening with suppressed fury, in grave and quiet tones He goes on to speak another parable. This time the story told is that of a man who was lord of a beautiful vineyard, on whose improvement he had spent much time and trouble. On leaving for a far country he let this vineyard out to certain husbandmen, and, by and by, when the time of grape harvest drew nigh, he sent his servants to them to demand his rightful dues.

But the false husbandmen refused to pay any dues; they would not so much as part with a single bunch of grapes. Not only so, they beat and ill-treated the messengers, and even went so far as to kill some of them.

At last the owner of the vineyard determined to send his only son to deal with these wicked, desperate men. 'They are sure to respect my son,' he thinks. But when the husbandmen saw the son their eyes shone with an evil light. 'This is the heir,' they whispered among themselves. 'Come, let us kill him, and then we can seize the vineyard for ourselves.' And so they fell upon him and slew him.

Now what, asks Jesus, will the lord of the vineyard do to these husbandmen?

Interested in His story in spite of themselves, and quite taken off their guard, His hearers answer that he would, of course, miserably destroy the wicked husbandmen and let out his vineyard to others. They did not know they were giving sentence against themselves, yet so it was. 'The vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah His pleasant plant; and He looked for judgment but behold oppression; for righteousness but behold a cry.'

God had let out His vineyard, the Jewish Church, to the ruling classes among the Jews; He had made them the leaders and teachers of the people; but what had they done with His inheritance? Where were the fruits of righteousness which He had a right to expect? Think of the patience and forbearance with which He had treated these priests and Pharisees, and how basely they had repaid His kindness. In time of old He had sent His messengers the prophets, and their forefathers had persecuted them.

THE MARRIAGE OF THE KING'S SON 321

Jeremiah they had slain, Isaiah they had sawn asunder; Zacharias, the son of Barachias, they had killed between the horns of the altar. And now that Jesus Himself had come, the wicked husbandmen were making ready to nail Him to the Cross. What could God do but take away the vineyard from men like these and give it into the hands of others?

Then, as Jesus ended His parable, He reminded His listeners of that verse of David's psalm which tells of a stone rejected of the Temple builders only to become in the end the chief corner-stone, binding the walls of the building together and crowning them with strength and beauty.

That Stone was Christ. Rejected by the Jews, He had been chosen by God as the corner-stone of a building greater and more splendid far than any earthly Temple, even the building of His 'Holy Church throughout all the world.'

Woe to those who should, by rejecting Him, stumble over that Stone, for they should be sorely bruised, even though by repentance it might be possible for them to rise again. Woe, thrice woe, to those upon whom the Stone should fall in judgment at the last day, when the time for repentance had gone by, for it should scatter them as the dust.

By this time the faces of Jesus' enemies were white with rage. It was only the presence of the crowd which prevented them from laying violent hands upon Him; but they were to listen to yet another parable of judgement from His lips. The parable of the wedding feast follows on the same lines as the parable of the great supper. Only here the giver of the feast is represented as a king, and the occasion of the feast the marriage of the king's son. This time, too, the invited guests not only refuse the

invitation sent them, but they even beat and insult and slay the royal messengers. The story ends, too, in a sterner fashion. Filled with anger at the insults and injuries that had been heaped upon him, the king sends his armies and destroys the murderers and burns up their city.

Such should be the fate of the Jewish nation, Jesus seems to say. They, the Jews, had refused God's calls and abused His messengers, and now God was preparing to send His armies against them, even the armies of Rome. His enemies should be put to the sword and their beautiful city, Jerusalem, given to the flames.

But the parable does not end here. After the first invited guests refuse the invitation sent them, the servants, just as in the parable of the great supper, are sent into the highways; and presently the king's hall is filled to overflowing with guests gathered from every quarter.

Now the king, though glad to welcome the very poorest to his table, was rightly particular that every one should come decently attired to the feast given in honour of his son. Beautiful white linen garments were therefore provided at the palace for all who had need of them, and with these the invited guests made haste to clothe themselves.

But there was one man who, either out of sheer carelessness or else studied insolence, did not trouble to put on the white garment provided by the king, but sat down to the banquet in his common everyday clothes.

By and by the king comes into the banquet hall, when his eye at once lights on this disrespectful guest. His face grows dark. 'Why are you here without your wedding garment?' he asks sternly, and at his words the man's throat grows dry with fear, and his lips are

unable to stammer out one word of excuse. 'Remove him,' says the king, turning to his servants; 'bind him with chains and lead him forth to his doom.' And out of the bright banquet hall, with its lights and flowers and music, the man is dragged; the great door opens—and with a cry he vanishes into the darkness and silence of the night.

Dear child, this latter part of Jesus' parable comes with a sound of solemn warning to ourselves. We are among the invited guests of which it speaks. God, the Great King, has called us all to His Heavenly Banquet, to fill the places of those who of old were called but would not come. All are invited, for there is room for all.

Only the King's guests must wear the King's robe. They must be found clothed, not in their own righteousness, but in the fair white robe of righteousness which Jesus gives. Nothing common or unclean can enter the Home of God; Heaven's joys are only for those who have learnt to repent of sin, and who have the Heavenly mind. And so I learn this lesson. If I would enter Heaven hereafter I must seek to 'put on the Lord Jesus Christ' now; my prayer to God must be the prayer which David prayed of old:—

'Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.' And, again, 'Search me, O Lord, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.'

II

A QUESTION ABOUT TRIBUTE MONEY—A LESSON ON THE
RESURRECTION LIFE — JESUS' STERNNESS AND HIS
PITY — A POOR WIDOW AND HER OFFERING — THE
INQUIRING GREEKS—JESUS LEAVES THE TEMPLE

TUESDAY's sun had not yet begun to go down and Jesus still lingered in the Temple Courts. Humbled, defeated, and put to shame, His enemies had withdrawn, but only as the wild beast withdraws for a time, having missed its spring. It was not long before they returned to the attack. This time, however, they did not venture to face Him themselves, but sent a band of their younger disciples to spy upon Him, and if possible to entangle Him in His talk.

Accompanied by a number of the Herodians, the spies came upon Jesus as He sat resting in one of the marble cloisters. Concealing their deadly purpose under the cloak of much outward deference and respect, they asked Him to help them solve a very puzzling and difficult question. They knew, they said, how brave and fearless He was, and how little He cared for public opinion. Would He help them to decide whether it were lawful to pay tribute to the Roman Emperor or not?

It seemed an innocent question, but it was really a very cunning one. As we have already seen, the Jews bitterly resented being in bondage to the hated Roman,

and one of their most cherished beliefs was that when the Christ came one of His first acts would be to free them from the foreign yoke under which they groaned. Should Jesus—so argued the spies—say the tax ought to be paid, He would put Himself hopelessly in the wrong with the people—especially with His own wild, freedom-loving people of Galilee—and they would cease to believe in Him. If, on the other hand, He said the tax should be resisted, it would be easy to report His words to the authorities and then He would be seized and punished as a rebel. Yes, it was a very cunning question; the more they turned it over in their minds the more impossible it seemed that Jesus could answer it without injury to Himself.

But the clear eyes that met their own could pierce through every disguise. Jesus saw the hook beneath the bait; He read the deadly purpose that underlay the innocent inquiry. 'Why tempt ye me, actors, wearers of a mask?' He said. 'Show me the tribute money.'

Now no self-respecting Pharisee would carry a heathen coin in his girdle, but a silver denarius is soon fetched from the table of one of the money-changers. Taking it in His hand Jesus holds it up for all to see, 'Whose is this image and superscription?' He asks, pointing to the Emperor's head and the legend running round the coin's silver rim. With an uneasy glance at one another, they answer, 'Cæsar's.' Then, like a lightning flash, comes Jesus' reply, 'Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's.'

There was a Jewish proverb current in our Lord's time which said, 'Wherever a king's coin is current, in that country he is counted king of the land,' and Jesus adopts its teaching, and turns it to account.

It was as though He said, 'By the very fact of your

using Cæsar's money you acknowledge Cæsar as your protector and that you owe him fealty. Therefore "give back" what you owe to him. It is only a matter of common honesty. But at the same time, while satisfying Cæsar's claims, do not forget to satisfy the claims of God. The coin belongs to Cæsar for it has his head upon it; you belong to God, for having been made in His image you bear the stamp of the King of Kings. Give back Cæsar his silver, but give God back—your-selves.'

As Jesus spoke, His words went home. Silently, with downcast faces, the young men departed. Their plot had failed, and in their hearts anger fought with shame.

Soon after this a company of Sadducees drew near to question Jesus in turn. These people were the sceptics of their age. They taught that there was no life beyond the grave, and neither angel nor spirit in the unseen world. The question they put had to do with the relationship which people will bear to one another after death, granted that a future life existed. If a woman had seven husbands one after another, whose wife should she be at the Resurrection? they asked. In reply Jesus told them that it was not possible to draw comparisons between earthly and Heavenly relationships. On earth the ties that bind us to one another are easily broken; friendship is turned to forgetfulness, love grows dim and fades and dies, but it is all so different in Heaven. On earth we grasp the shadow—

'In Heaven we have the real and true and sure.
'Tis there they neither marry nor are given
In marriage, but are as the angels.'

That was His answer to the foolish question they had asked Him. With regard to the resurrection of the

dead and the life beyond the grave, they professed to believe Moses' teaching, did they not remember how Moses had spoken of God as the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob? When Moses used these words the patriarchs had long been laid to rest in their rock-built tombs. Did he mean that God was the God of 'a little handful of unlovely dust,' or even the God of men who had trusted in Him during life, but now that they were dead could trust in Him no longer? Surely that could not have been Moses' meaning. No, he meant that God was the patriarchs' God to-day; that they still lived, that God's protecting care was still around them and would enfold them always. God was not the God of the dead but of the living, 'for all live unto Him.'

When the Sadducees heard these words, they were like men gagged, and could find nothing to answer. There were a number of Scribes standing by listening to Jesus' teaching, and, as He spoke, they could not help exclaiming, 'Master, Thou hast beautifully said.'

Then one of them, a man learned in the law, stepped forward and asked Jesus a question on his own account, to 'tempt' or try His powers still further. 'Which is the great commandment in the law?' he said.

The schools of the Rabbis were always making fresh laws, and laying down new rules and regulations for the service and worship of God, and so numerous in time had these become that it was quite impossible to keep them all. People therefore had begun to question which laws ought to be kept in preference to others; and to ask which were the most important and the most binding. In reply some teachers said, 'the law about tassels,' others 'the law about phylacteries,' but no one seemed able to decide. Jesus answered them the crown and flower of all God's commandments was—Love. 'Love God with

all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might, and love your neighbour as yourself.' That was the sum of all true religion. Love alone was the key to a holy life, it was the Heavenly talisman that turned all it touched to gold. As Jesus spoke the Scribe's face lightened with enthusiasm. How right Jesus was! Here was a Teacher come from God indeed. 'Master,' he cried eagerly yet with softened voice, 'Thou hast said the truth rightly; for there is but one God; and there is none other but He, and to love Him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.' And when Jesus heard these words He knew they had come from 'an honest and good heart,' and He was glad and said, 'Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God.'

And now, having answered all the questions that had been addressed to Him, Jesus turned to those who stood around Him and put a question to them in turn, a solemn, searching question which has never ceased to ring in men's ears all down the ages, and still remains to-day the great question by which men stand or fall—'What think ye of Christ, whose Son is He?' Who was the Messiah? What was His mission? from whence should He come? in what relation would He stand to the world? Was He simply a Prince in the line of the ancient Jewish Kings—a good man—a wise teacher—and nothing more?

The answer that comes shows that this was indeed the only way His hearers had learned to look upon the Christ. 'He is the Son of David,' they said.—Jesus answered that He was the Son of God.

Yes, this was David's own verdict. He himself had

written of Him, 'The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou on My right hand, till I make Thine enemies Thy footstool?' If David then had called Christ Lord, how could He be his son?

By this time the rays of the westering sun, shining through the Temple Courts, had begun to turn to red the gilding of the marble pillars, and to paint long shadows in dusky purple upon the tessellated floors. The time was drawing on when Jesus must leave the shelter of God's beautiful house.

But before He went there remained a stern, sad duty to perform. As God's Son He had a judgment to pronounce against God's enemies—those wicked rulers, those false teachers, those blind guides in whose hands God had placed the religious training of the nation, and who had so shamefully abused their trust. As they had sinned openly so their wickedness must openly be proclaimed.

Standing forth before all the people, 'His feet upon the pavement of the Temple, but speaking as from the throne in Heaven,' Jesus pronounces an eightfold woe against painted Pharisee, and smooth-tongued lawyer, against hypocritical chief priest, and deceitful Scribe, and all the rest of the wicked crew. As He speaks a sharp sword seems to issue from between His lips. He denounces them for their hypocrisy, their love for the praise of men, their oppression of the poor, their pride, their vanity, their party spirit, their covetousness and greed. Never before had the Temple Courts rung to such burning, fiery words. The people as they listen glance at one another in frightened amazement, while Scribe and Pharisee shrink before Him, the red light of hate deepening in their eyes, like wild beasts roused to fury and yet afraid to spring. There is a holy anger which comes from the sight of cruel deeds, acts of oppression,

insults offered to God. Jesus' anger was like that. It did not arise because of injuries done to Himself; it was an anger felt against the wickedness which took advantage of the weak, that trod down the helpless, that mocked at a long-suffering God.

And yet, let the flame of anger leap never so high in Jesus' heart, the angel of pity was ever at hand to quench its fierceness. In the very midst of His stern denunciations His voice begins to falter. Oh, how sad it all was, all this sin and wrongdoing and rebellion, when God meant it to be so different! If only His people would have listened to His message; if only they would have allowed Him to save them as He so longed to do! He had called them all, Scribe and Pharisee, publican and sinner alike, into His fold, even as the hen calls her brood together beneath her sheltering wings when the cruel hawk circles in the blue overhead, but they would not come. Now it was too late! 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem . . . how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not. Behold your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you that ye shall not see Me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.'

With these sad, pathetic words upon His lips, Jesus rose and passed out into the Court of the Women. While He sat resting here, weary and sad at heart, a beautiful little incident happened which, as some one says, stands out amid the events of the day 'like a rose amid a field of thistles.'

Ranged about a sort of corridor in the court stood thirteen great brazen chests, called 'Trumpets' (perhaps because of their trumpet-shaped mouths) into which the Temple worshippers used to drop their offerings for the

support of the Temple services, the decoration of the building, and the relief of the poor.

The court that afternoon was full of worshippers, and mingled with the sound of moving feet and the hum of voices came the chink of gold and silver coins falling into the chests. Presently Jesus saw a woman timidly making her way through the respectable, well-dressed crowd. St. Mark describes her condition in three words—‘poor—alone—a widow.’ In her hand she held two little copper coins, each smaller than one farthing—all the money she had in the world. Standing in front of one of the larger chests, she drops in both her copper pieces quite simply, and goes on her way, unconscious that she has done anything at all remarkable, thinking herself quite unnoticed.

And she was unnoticed by the crowd; only One saw the beautiful action, and that was Jesus. Nothing ever escaped His eye. Sitting over against the treasury He noticed everything, He understood all. Calling His disciples He bids them notice the splendid gifts of the rich, and then, pointing to the poor widow, He says that her humble offering has outweighed them all.

It seemed a strange thing to say. What! two little copper pieces worth all the gold and silver that choked the trumpet chests to overflowing! Why, how far would such an offering go towards the support of the Temple services? How many pounds of incense would it buy? How much gilding for the marble pillars, or oil for the golden lamps?

Ah, but the same things weigh differently in the scales of the world and the scales of God! The world judges a gift by its size; it asks what is the market value of this or that action; what profit is it likely to bring? God looks at the spirit of the gift; He judges of an action

by the motive that lies behind it. According as this is good or bad so He accepts the offering men make Him, or else rejects it.

They tell an old story about one of the Emperors of Rome, Justinian by name. He built a beautiful church but would allow no one to help him, because he wished to have all the glory and praise himself. When it was finished he put up a great tablet with an inscription saying that the church had been built by himself alone.

The next morning the name on the tablet was found to be altered, and the name of Euphrasia shone there in silver letters instead of Justinian. Inquiry was made everywhere for Euphrasia among the great and noble, but without success. At last a priest reported that he knew of a poor woman of that name, and she was sent for and asked whether she had dared to meddle with the Emperor's work. Then the poor woman made this answer. She said that she had been ill for three months, and that every day during her illness a linnet had come and sung at her window ; and she was so grateful to God for having sent the little singing-bird to cheer her, that she longed to do something to show her gratitude. So when she got well again, having noticed how the oxen slipped as they drew the heavy stones for the building of the church up the steep hill by her house, she pulled a little straw from her mattress, and laid it on the road, so as to make their work easier for them. Then the Emperor knew that her gift was accepted because it was done for the love of God, while his own was refused, because it was given in pride, and for his own glory.

Dear child, it was just so that Jesus judged of the gift of the two mites. It was like the gift of the straw in the story, a poor meagre offering in itself, and yet splendid because of the love and self-sacrifice which lay behind it.

Those little, common, copper coins shone in Jesus' eyes far more brightly than all the gold and silver in the treasury, just because they were the gift of a loving, grateful heart.

Others gave of what cost them nothing—she cast in all the living that she had.

As Jesus passed out into the Court of the Gentiles, He was told that certain strangers craved an audience with Him. They were Greeks, converts to the Jewish religion, who had come up to keep the feast, perhaps from one of the half-heathen cities of Decapolis, perhaps from 'the sunny land of music and of song,' Greece itself.

Doubtless they had heard of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, of the raising of Lazarus, and of His other wonderful works, and they were filled with longing to behold so great a Teacher. And so they came to Philip, 'the one apostle with a Greek name,' with the request, 'Sir, we would see Jesus.'

St. Philip was uncertain what to do. Jesus had already told His disciples that He was not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. He might not be willing to receive these men of an alien race. So he puts the question to St. Andrew, and St. Andrew, eager to act the missionary's part, at once carries the request of the strangers to Jesus, and no doubt shortly afterwards leads them into His presence.

In the coming of these Greeks Jesus saw the promise of the spread of His Kingdom among the nations of the world. Wise men from the East had already sought His cradle, now these strangers from the West had come to group themselves around His Cross. They had arrived, He tells them, just in time to see His glory. The Cross, beneath whose shadow they were even now standing, was to be the throne from which He should reign. In nature

death was often the gate of life. A grain of corn remains fruitless unless sown in the furrow. Sow it, let it die, as it were, in the ground, and it becomes in time the mother of many a golden harvest.

So with Himself. He must die, but from His death would issue life; after the sowing would come the harvest; by the seeming defeat of the Cross the world would yet be won for God. Even as He spoke, however, a shudder passed over Jesus; the thought of the burden that He was so soon to bear on the Cross—the awful burden of man's sin—drew from Him a cry of agony. 'Now is My soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify Thy Name.' And even as He spoke a voice pealed from Heaven—the same dread Voice which had spoken at His Baptism and Transfiguration, 'I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.'

There were deaf ears in the crowd around Jesus. At the sound of the voice some cried out that it thundered; others, whose ears were more attuned to Heavenly things, declared that an angel had spoken to Jesus. Jesus told them that the voice had come not for His sake, but for their own. The judgment of the world was near at hand, the power of the prince of the world, the devil, should soon be broken. 'And I, if so be that I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me.'

As the people listened to these strange words they understood that Jesus was speaking to them of His death, and that the lifting up of which He spoke was the lifting up of the Cross. They therefore began to murmur. How could He be the Christ if He were about to suffer, and to die a death of shame? They could not understand Him.

Jesus did not try to explain His words to them; the

time for teaching had now gone by. As He turned to go He just made one last, earnest, sad appeal to win them to His side. 'Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you. . . . While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light.' So saying He left the Temple: and the sun went down.

III

THE SECOND COMING—THE PARABLES OF THE WISE AND
FOOLISH VIRGINS, THE TALENTS, THE SHEEP AND
THE GOATS—HOW JUDAS BETRAYED HIS MASTER—
HOW THE KING GAVE HIS DISCIPLES A ROYAL GIFT.

As they followed Jesus out of the Temple, the disciples lingered to take one last look at the dazzling glories of God's beautiful House.

'Master,' said one of them wistfully, 'see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!'

Jesus paused, while His eyes took in the splendour of the scene around Him; the spacious, decorated courts, rising like garden terraces, one above another, the cloisters with their clustered columns and soaring pinnacles; and, towering high above all the other buildings, the beautiful Sanctuary itself, built of great milk-white blocks of marble and roofed with gold.

'Seest thou these great buildings?' came His answer. 'There shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.'

Perplexed and saddened by this strange saying, the disciples walked on in silence. In silence they crossed the valley of the Cedron, and began to climb the slopes of Olivet. Arriving at the mountain's brow, Jesus sat down to rest beneath the shadow of the goodly cedar-trees, and His disciples grouped themselves around Him.

Though the sun had set, the western horizon was still

aglow with light, and like some glorious mountain, with rugged peaks lifted high in air, the piled up Temple buildings massed themselves in splendid outline against a rose-red sky.

As Jesus sat gazing at the fair scene at His feet, anxious voices put the question, 'Tell us, when shall these things be, and what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?'

Jesus did not always reply to His disciples' questions directly. It was His way to answer His questioners in such a fashion as to teach them what was really necessary for them to learn, and not simply what they wanted to know. And so He does not say plainly when the Temple should fall, or what the sign of the end of the world should be. He simply tells His disciples that both these events are drawing on, and bids them prepare for their coming. Her enemies should encircle Jerusalem with a ring of iron; the flames should play upon her palaces and towers, and famine and pestilence should waste her streets. But before this happened many things must first occur. There should be wars and rumours of wars; false Christs and false teachers should arise; Christ's disciples should be tempted, scourged, thrown into dungeons, and brought before kings and magistrates for His Name's sake. Their own friends would turn against them, and they should reap the scorn and hatred of men. Then, when the Gospel of the Kingdom had been fully preached, the end should come.

As regards the coming of that still more terrible day of judgment, the Dies Iræ or great Day of Wrath, when the sun should be darkened and the moon should not give her light, and the stars of Heaven should fall, and the powers that be in Heaven should be shaken, it

was not needful, or possible, to tell the exact time of its approach.

The necessary thing was to live in readiness for it.

Very suddenly, very unexpectedly would that Day appear. The world would be going on its way, very much as in the days of Noah. People would be eating and drinking, and buying and selling, and pleasuring and sinning, without a thought of the coming doom; when suddenly the sign of the Son of Man should appear in the sky, and the Son of Man Himself should be seen coming in the clouds of Heaven, in power and great glory, to judge the world.

‘Watch therefore,’ adds Jesus, ‘for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.’

To press home this need of watchfulness, and to teach His disciples how best to prepare for the Great Assize, Jesus spoke the parables of the wise and foolish virgins and the talents.

It is night; the stars are burning in the purple sky like balls of fire; the air is full of music and the scent of scattered flowers. There is a twinkle of feet and a ripple of laughter, as a joyous band of maidens pass on their way to meet a bridegroom who is bringing home his bride. They are decked in bridal attire, in their hands they carry myrtle boughs and sprays of jessamine, and they hold aloft long poles on which bright lamps are slung. But the bridegroom is slow in coming, and after long waiting the maidens, clustered together by the wayside, fall asleep.

Suddenly the silence of the night is broken by a cry, ‘Behold, the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him,’ and in a moment they are wide awake, and busily trimming their lamps.

But of the ten maidens who had started out to meet

the bridegroom, five had forgotten to put oil in their vessels, and to their alarm they find their lamps are beginning to flicker and to go out.

‘Give us of your oil,’ they cry to their sisters, ‘for our lamps are going out.’ But the others refuse. ‘Our store is not enough to go round,’ they answer; ‘better go and buy oil for yourselves.’ And off run the forgetful five to seek the houses of ‘them that sell.’

Meanwhile, with the flare of torches and the music of flute and cymbal, the bridal procession sweeps by, and the wise virgins enter with the bridegroom into the house of feasting—‘and the door was shut.’ Presently up come the foolish five, all breathless, their lamps still unlighted, and begin to knock at the closed door.

Faintly to their listening ear comes the sound of the music and the murmur of happy voices at the feast. ‘Open to us!’ they cry. Then, as they stand waiting with beating hearts, a voice from within answers, ‘I know you not,’ and we see them turn away weeping. The foolish virgins were not ready when the bridegroom came, and so they were shut out from his presence. ‘Take care,’ Jesus seems to say, ‘that it be not so with you. Have oil in your lamps. It is your work in life, as My light-bearers, to hold aloft the lamp of a holy life so that its light may be seen by all around you. Only remember, you cannot shine for God unless God’s Holy Spirit pours the oil of His grace into your hearts, and so gives you the power of shining. Learn then to seek for His grace; be watchful, be diligent in prayer, keep very near God. As long as you do this you are safe; directly you begin to get out of touch with God, the oil of His grace will cease to flow into your hearts. Then your light will slowly but surely flicker out, and in the end you will be shut out of the marriage feast of Heaven.’

Having thus taught the need of keeping the heart with all diligence as a preparation for His coming, Jesus went on to teach the need of faithfulness in outward service.

The parable of the talents follows on the same lines as the parable of the pounds. We have the master going into a far country. We have the good servants who trade with the money their lord intrusts to them, and who win a hearty 'well-done' on his return. We have the slothful servant who lets his lord's money lie idle, and is punished for his sloth by having his money taken away from him. The chief differences are these—in the one case the sum lent is small, in the other large; in one case the different servants have the same sum to start with, and in the other they have different sums; in one case the faithful servants differ from one another in the amount they gain; in the other each gains exactly twice as much as he had at the beginning. We are all, the parable reminds us, servants of an absent Master, who has intrusted us with Heavenly money—gifts, powers, opportunities—which must be used to His glory, and of which at His coming again we shall have to render an account. To some God has given more than others, but no one is left without some gift which can be turned to useful purpose.

Now in the Heavenly, as in the earthly life, there is a law of gain. The faithful servant in the parable made good use of his lord's money, and by use it increased. So it is with the Heavenly gifts and opportunities. The more we use them, the more by use they will multiply and strengthen. In the Heavenly, as in the earthly life, there is a law of loss. The slothful servant buried his lord's money in the ground and it was taken away from him in the end. So if we are too careless or too slothful

to use the powers God has given us, we, in the same way, shall end by losing them altogether.

Be diligent then in turning your Master's gifts to account, so that, at His coming, you may have something to show as the fruit of your lives. Make the most of your opportunities of service. Then God, if you are faithful, will reward you by advancing you to higher service hereafter, and in this way you shall enter into the joy of your Lord.

' You must live each day at your very best ;
The work of the world is done by few ;
God asks that a part be done by you.

' Say oft of the years as they pass from sight,
" This is life with its golden store ;
I shall have it once, but it comes no more."

' Have a purpose, and do with your utmost might :
You will finish your work on the other side,
When you wake in His likeness, satisfied.'

After this Jesus drew a picture of Himself as a King seated on the throne of His glory, with all the nations of the world gathered before Him. The Day of Judgment has come, and the souls of men are being weighed. As the earthly shepherd separates the black goats from the fair white sheep, so He, the Heavenly Shepherd, separates the bad people from the good. The good are called to inherit God's Kingdom ; the evil are sent away into everlasting punishment. And the ground of the separation is a very simple one. It all comes out of service to Himself. ' I was hungered—thirsty—a stranger—naked—sick—in prison ; and ye fed Me—gave Me drink—clothed Me—visited and came unto Me—or else did none of these things.' And then when both hosts look up in amazement the King explains, ' Inasmuch as ye did it—or did

it not unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye did it—or did it not—to Me.'

By this picture Jesus meant to teach the disciples another great truth, namely, that the life of preparation for His coming must be one of loving-kindness, as well as of inward devotion and the faithful use of God's gifts. God wants us all to try to make the world in which we live a happier and brighter place for our presence in it. Jesus' disciples must always be on the look-out for opportunities of doing little acts of kindness to others; of easing the burdens that weary shoulders have to carry, of helping tired feet along life's sometimes hard and rugged road. Doing this, they may remember for their comfort, that the King counts all kindness and help shown to others as shown to Himself.

Did you ever hear the story of Martin and his vision?

He was a poor Russian cobbler, and all his life he wanted to see Jesus. One night he dreamed that Jesus was coming to see him the next day. He worked in a cellar, the windows of which were just high enough to let him see the feet of those who passed by.

Rising in the morning he began to work at his shoes with a glad heart, saying to himself: 'The Lord is coming to see me to-day,' when presently, looking up, he saw a pair of feet staggering along. Going into the street he found a poor woman who had been wandering about all night, and who had a sick child upon her shoulder. Moved with pity, Martin took her into his house and gave her part of his breakfast. He then sat down to his work again, wondering when the Lord would come.

About midday he saw another pair of feet moving along very slowly and painfully, and on going upstairs once more he found an old starving beggar-man. And Martin took him down and shared his midday meal with

him and sent him away. And the day was half gone, and the Lord had not come.

Then in the evening there was another pair of feet which seemed to belong to some violent person, and he went up and saw an old apple-woman and a boy in hot dispute, and finding they too were hungry he took them both down and shared his supper with them, and then he went sadly to bed, because the day was passed, and the Lord had not come, according to his dream. And as he lay down he dreamed again. And there first came the woman with the sick child, and she looked at him in his sleep, and said: 'Martin, didst thou not know Me?' And the old man came, and the apple-woman, and the boy, and they each said: 'Martin, didst thou not know Me?'

And then Martin saw and remembered. 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.'

When Jesus had finished speaking He arose, and once more followed the mountain-path to Bethany. There He remained that night and all the following day, calmly preparing Himself for the end by prayer, and enjoying for the last time the fellowship of His dearest earthly friends.

But while Jesus rested, His enemies were on the alert. Stung to madness by His words in the Temple, the Council held a hurried meeting in the house of Caiaphas, to discuss how Jesus could best be seized and put to death. It was the eve of the Passover, and, to avoid any trouble with the people, they decided to wait till the feast was over and the pilgrims had gone home, before making Jesus prisoner.

But God had decided otherwise. The time had come; the true Paschal Lamb must be sacrificed at the Feast. Even while the chief priests argue, there is a knock at the door, and presently a cloaked figure is ushered into

the room. His hood falls back; the light shines on his face. It is Judas.

Poor, wretched Judas! For many a long day past his soul has been the battle-ground upon which his good and evil angel have fought a desperate fight. Now the contest is over. The evil angel has conquered. Judas has come to sell his Lord.

We seem to see him as he stands before the Council, his head thrust a little forward, his long, lean fingers fumbling at the strings of the money-bag at his side, the red glint of malice in his shifting eyes.

‘What will ye give me?’ he asks, ‘and I will deliver Him unto you?’—There is no need to mention Jesus’ name.

And then the shameful bargaining begins. The chief priests haggle; they beat him down, until at last he consents to take thirty pieces of silver as the price of his Master’s blood. Presently, with the blood money in his purse, he speeds back to Bethany, as silent-footed as a wolf, ‘the dark design of murder at his heart.’

Thirty pieces of silver! It was the price paid in olden times in compensation for a slave who had been gored to death by an ox. There have been many pitiful bargains struck in the history of the world, but surely none so pitiful as this. Esau’s birthright bartered away for a basin of red soup, Joseph sold by his brethren to be a bond-servant in Egypt for a handful of money; the secret of his strength betrayed by Samson in exchange for the smiles of a wicked woman—what are all these bad bargains compared to his who, for thirty pieces of silver, sold the Pearl of Great Price, Jesus Christ Himself, and with Him his own peace of mind and hope of Heaven?

It was now Thursday, ‘green Thursday,’ as it was called, the day before the Passover. By this time all

Jerusalem was astir; houses were being searched by candlelight to discover any traces of leaven; the Passover lambs were being bought, and the rooms were being prepared for the coming festival.

Jesus was still at Bethany, when His disciples came to Him and asked Him where it was His wish to eat the Passover supper.

In reply He bade St. Peter and St. John go to Jerusalem, and, at the entrance to the city, they should meet a man carrying a pitcher of water. Let them follow him, and say to the master of the house into which he entered: 'The Master saith unto thee, Where is the guest chamber, where I shall eat the Passover with My disciples?' Then the host—one of Jesus' secret disciples, we may suppose—would show them a large upper-room in his house; there let them make ready.

And so St. Peter and St. John start off at sunset, and find everything as Jesus had said. Together they get the room ready; they spread the table; they arrange the couches; they place by the door the jars of water for the feet; and when all is in order and the feast prepared, with happy, joyous faces they await the coming of their Lord.

At nightfall He comes with the rest of the disciples—the traitor Judas among them. What a wonderful look there is in the Master's face to-night, how radiant and full of joy it is; His eyes shine like stars, so brimful are they of the light of love and tenderness.

Ah! He is about to give His disciples a most wonderful gift. How can He help rejoicing when He thinks of all the blessing and happiness that gift will mean to them? But first there is other work to be done. As the disciples take their places around the table, signs of jealousy and discontent begin to show themselves. All want the best seats for themselves; moreover, because each is too proud

to take the servant's place and bathe his comrades' feet, they all recline at table unwashed. Even the Master Himself, after His long, weary walk in the dust, has no one to cool His hands and feet in water, and to dry them.

Without saying a word Jesus rises from His place, and while all look on wonderingly, He takes off His white holiday robe, and girding Himself with a towel, pours water into a basin and begins to wash His disciples' feet. Ah! how brows redden and hearts sink with shame as the Master does for each, what each was too proud to do even for the Master.

Poor Peter is especially remorseful. 'Lord, dost Thou wash *my* feet?' he asks. Jesus answers: 'What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.' 'Thou shalt never wash my feet,' protests Peter indignantly. Jesus knew the way to deal with Peter. 'If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me,' He answers gravely. Peter is wounded to the quick. Repentant, shamed, eager all at once, he replies, 'Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.' Jesus answered: 'He that hath been bathed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit.'

And so He goes from one to the other. He washes the feet of St. Andrew, His brave missionary; He washes the feet of St. John, the dear disciple; He washes the feet of the traitor Judas. Oh, with what tender, pitying touch did Jesus bathe those unworthy feet that were so swift to shed His blood! Perhaps even now Judas might relent, and come back to God by the door of a late repentance. But the traitor gives no sign, and Jesus turns sadly away.

So when He had washed His disciples' feet and had again taken His place at the table, He said, 'Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call Me Master and Lord:

and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.'

Dear child, the best teachers are always those who teach not only by their words, but by their example as well. And so it was here. Jesus was not content to bid His disciples be humble, He set them an example of humility. By serving them He taught them the beauty of service, by forgetting self He set forth the beauty of self-forgetfulness. How the vision of their Master, girded about with a towel, would rise up and rebuke them afterwards, when they were tempted to struggle after the high place, or turn aside from the lowly duty!

To understand what follows, we must suppose that Judas reclined on the couch just above Jesus, while at Jesus' right hand rested St. John, near enough to his Master to whisper in His ear, and lean his head upon His breast.

Thoughts of Judas' treachery had begun to fill the heart of Jesus with a great sadness. As they were eating, He said, 'Verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray Me.' Silence in the room. We seem to see by the lamplight the pale faces of the disciples turned on one another, 'doubting of whom He spake.' Then a chorus of voices breaking out—'Lord, is it I? Lord, is it I? Oh, do not say that I—or I—or I should fall so low as to do this thing!' but Jesus only answers that the traitor is present, dipping with Him in the dish. 'Lord, who is it?' It is St. John who speaks, urged on by Simon Peter to ask the question. Jesus answers in a low voice, 'He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it.' With this, He dips a piece of bread in the Passover dish of figs and raisins, soaked in vinegar, and gives it to Judas.

‘Master, is it I?’ asks the traitor half fearfully, half defiantly, as one who already knows the answer that is coming. Jesus answers, ‘Thou hast said.’ Then having received the sop, ‘Satan,’ we read, ‘entered into Judas,’ and at Jesus’ bidding, ‘That thou doest, do quickly,’ he arose and immediately went out; and it was night.

Along the dark, narrow byways speeds the traitor to the spot where the enemies of Jesus await his coming. He treads very softly; you cannot even hear the sound of his footfall in the silent streets. Who is this that is out so late?

‘It is a wolf runs up and down,
With a black track in the snow.’

A weight seemed lifted from Jesus’ heart as the door closed on Judas, and the old look of peace and quiet joy came back. ‘Little children,’ He said, and His words came with all the loving, tender ring of a mother’s voice, ‘yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek Me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say to you. A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another.’

Then seated in that upper chamber—the first Christian Church—with the silvery moonbeams lighting up the long, low table—the first Christian altar—Jesus gave His disciples the great gift of the Holy Communion.

We have seen how it had always been Jesus’ way to take the common things of earth and make them glorious by His touch. So now He takes the common bread which lies before Him on the table, and having blessed it, He says, ‘Take, eat, this is My Body which is



THE LAST SUPPER

given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me.' He takes the Passover cup of wine, and raising it in His hands He says in the same way, 'Drink ye all of this; for this is My Blood of the New Testament, which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins. Do this, as oft as ye shall drink it, in remembrance of Me.'

Oh, with what awe and holy gladness did the disciples do as Jesus commanded! They did not ask, with the unbelieving Jews at Capernaum, 'How can this man give us His flesh to eat?' In simple faith they just took Jesus at His word. They ate, they drank, and eating and drinking they were drawn into Heavenly communion with their Lord. Jesus, 'The Bread of Life,' gave Himself to them to be their life. Their sinful bodies were made clean by His Body, and their souls washed by His most precious Blood.

Such was the beginning of the great Christian festival of the Holy Communion which was ordained to take the place of the Jewish Passover.

Ever since that day Jesus' service has been the chief service of the Christian Church.

Dear child, how good God is! When Jesus was here on earth, only a few out of very many were able to draw near to Him to feel His cleansing, healing touch. But when He broke the bread and poured the wine the night before He died, He opened up a new and wonderful way by which all may draw near to Him, and He may draw near to all. We do not know how Jesus comes to us in Holy Communion; we see through a glass darkly now; no one is able to explain to us the mystery. We just do what the disciples did; we take Jesus at His word, and we find His promise true, 'Come unto Me all that travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you.'

‘ Lord, let us come to Thee again,
Oft as we see Thy Table spread,
And tokens of Thy dying pain,
The wine poured out, the broken bread !
Bless, bless, O Lord, Thy children’s prayer,
That they may come and find Thee there.’

And now the Sacred Feast is at an end, but, before rising from table, Jesus lingers to speak words of comfort and encouragement to the disciples, whose faith and loyalty are soon so sorely to be tried.

‘ Let not your heart be troubled : ye believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s House are many mansions : if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you . . . I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life : no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me . . . If ye love Me, keep My Commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever . . . I will not leave you comfortless : I will come to you. . . . Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you : not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.’

So Jesus speaks, and at His words the doubts and fears of the disciples vanish, and a new courage fills their hearts.

Then, having sung an hymn—one of the glad Passover triumph psalms—they fared out together into the starry night, towards Olivet.

IV

GETHSEMANE—THE ARREST—JESUS IN THE PALACE OF CAIAPHAS—HOW ST. PETER DENIED HIS MASTER— THE FATE OF JUDAS

THE moon was shining brightly in the empty streets as Jesus and His disciples passed on their way towards the city gate.

As they went Jesus began to warn the apostles that the time was at hand when they all would forsake Him. That very night the Good Shepherd should be smitten, and the sheep should be scattered. St. Peter felt hurt at Jesus' warning words. What! fail or turn his back upon his Master?—not if the whole world turned against Him. Very sad, very searching was the look that Jesus gave His boastful, self-confident disciple. 'Verily I say unto thee,' He said, 'that this day, even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny Me thrice.'

'Master, I would die first,' protests St. Peter earnestly, and all the disciples echo his words; 'Master, we would sooner die.'

They were now nearing the Temple. There, high above their heads, glittering in the moonlight, the great golden bunch of grapes could be plainly seen, trailing its clusters over the Temple porch. It was perhaps the sight of this golden vine that suggested to Jesus the lovely allegory of the vine and its branches. 'I am the true Vine, and My Father is the Husbandman . . .

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine: no more can ye, except ye abide in Me. I am the Vine, ye are the branches. . . . Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be My disciples.' After this Jesus spoke of the day of suffering and sorrow which was coming, and of the great gift of the Comforter whom He should send from the Father to strengthen and bless them and to guide them into all truth.

Very sweet and full of comfort were His words, and as He ended His discourse there was a ring of triumph in His voice. 'These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.'

The Temple, we are told, was open at midnight, and it was perhaps in one of its courts that Jesus, with pleading face lifted to the starry sky, offered up that beautiful prayer of priestly intercession which St. John's gospel has preserved for us; in which He prayed, oh so tenderly, for the little, lowly band of followers He was about to leave behind, and for His whole Church to the end of the world. Long and earnestly He prayed—for His disciples that God would keep them through His own name, and sanctify and preserve them from all evil—for all those who should believe through their message, that they all might be one, so that by their unity the world might believe that God had sent Him.

And now, His prayer at an end, Jesus left the Temple Court, and going down into the valley of the Cedron, crossed the little rushing brook at its foot, and made His way towards the garden of Gethsemane.

Gethsemane was a place very dear to Jesus. Often when weary of treading the hot, narrow, crowded streets

of Jerusalem, He would turn aside to seek the peace and quiet of the garden on the hill. It was one of His favourite places for prayer. Again and again the morning star would find Him where the evening star had left Him, kneeling beneath the silver screen of the olive-trees whose shadows lay so thickly upon the spreading turf.

All was silence, save for the sound of the Cedron's running water and the rustle of the olive branches. The moon lit up the valley with her mellow light, and every rock and tree stood out as clearly as though it had been day. Leaving the rest of the disciples at the garden gate, and taking with Him St. Peter, St. James, and St. John, Jesus passed in beneath the trees to meet the most awful hour of His life.

Presently 'My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death,' He says; 'tarry ye here and watch while I go and pray yonder.' Then, while His disciples stand wondering and looking upon one another, He tears Himself away, and with bowed head and faltering step passes away among the shadows. As He kneels, still darker shadows gather about His heart. An agony, a struggle begins, so awful that even He, who never flinched from the most bitter pain, can hardly endure it. Drops of blood start upon His forehead and fall to the ground. 'O My Father,' He prays, 'if it be possible let this cup pass from Me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt.'

Dear child, what was this mysterious agony? Was it the fear of to-morrow's suffering and cruel death? Ah no! to think that, would be to set the Master below many a brave disciple who afterwards, for His sake, faced the flames with a smile, or went to meet the lion's spring, or the torture of the rack, 'like one who wraps the drapery of his couch about him, and lies down to pleasant dreams.' It was not the Cross itself, it was the awful

shadow of the Cross that weighed upon Him ; it was the knowledge that He, the all-holy Son of God, must bear upon His shoulders the sins of all the world. Oh, what a sore burden that was to carry ! We sometimes think lightly about sin and speak lightly about it, but if we want to see what sin is really like, we have only to think of Jesus in the garden, His beautiful face white with sorrow, the blood-drops upon His brow, His loving heart strained to the point of breaking. It was sin which made Jesus suffer so ; your sin and mine. . . .

Rising from His knees, Jesus went back to His disciples, hoping to find comfort and support from their love and sympathy. They were there where He had left them ; the moonlight glittered on St. Peter's sword ; it fell on the upturned face of St. John ; it touched the crouching figure of St. James—they were fast asleep.

With grieved and sorrowful eyes Jesus stood looking down upon His friends.

'Simon, sleepest *thou* ?' He said to St. Peter. 'Couldst thou not watch with Me one hour ?—thou so full of brave promises ; thou, who a little ago, wast ready to lay down thy life for My sake ?' Then, as the disciples, awakened by the sound of His voice, started up in confusion, He added these warning words, 'Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.'

Again Jesus went away to endure his awful agony and to pray, and again, coming back, He found His disciples asleep, for their eyes were heavy, neither wist they what to answer Him. Oh, if they had only been a little stronger ! By keeping faithful watch with their Master they might at least have taken one little thorn from His crown of thorns ; while by earnest prayer they might have strengthened their own hearts against the coming peril. But they missed their chance. The



THE AGONY IN THE GARDEN

time they might have used in helping both Him and themselves was all wasted. And now for the third time Jesus went away to fight His lonely battle in the dark, with none to share His watch or help lift up His hands, as Aaron and Hur lifted up the hands of Moses upon the mountain.

But this time, at the battle's close, He comes forth victorious. The cup is not to pass; He must drink it to the dregs, but as it is His Father's hand that holds it out to Him to drink, so it is His Father who gives Him the power to drink it. As He bows Himself in His agony beneath the olive-trees, an angel is seen strengthening Him. Then when He rises there is no faltering or fear. The victory has been won; henceforth the King goes forth 'conquering and to conquer.'

As He returned for the last time to His disciples, Jesus' eye caught the red glare of torches among the trees, and He knew that His enemies, with Judas at their head, were closing in upon Him. The time for watchfulness was over. 'Rise, let us be going,' He said. 'Behold, he is at hand that doth betray Me.'

Even as He spoke, a band of men, armed with swords and cudgels, and carrying torches, broke through the trees, and began to search the garden. Calmly Jesus stepped forth and confronted them. 'Whom seek ye?' He asked. As He spoke, the crowd that had begun to gather around Him reeled backward and fell to the ground, as though they had seen the Angel of the Agony with drawn sword standing at His side. It was Jesus' kingly presence, and the clear, brave ring of His voice as He stood there unarmed and unafraid, that filled them with this sudden panic.

Then Jesus spoke again, telling them that He was the Man they sought. While they still hesitated, Judas

stepped forward out of the shadows, fearful lest even now Jesus should escape, and gave the soldiers the sign which he had agreed to give them. 'Hail, Master!' he said; and coming up to Him he kissed Him, with pretended warmth, upon the cheek.

Dear child, we are about to think much of Jesus' sufferings, the insults, the mockery, the pains which He endured on His way to the Cross, but I do not think that any insult from His enemies, or any pang from thorn-wreath or from nail, hurt Jesus as much as that kiss of Judas—the false friend, whom He had tried so hard to win by love, the ungrateful disciple whom He had shielded and excused and done His best to save. And yet He uttered no reproaches. 'Judas,' He said sadly, 'betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?' That was all. Then the soldiers closed round Him and began to bind Him.

But there was one who would not tamely stand by and see His Master bound. In an instant St. Peter is by Jesus' side. 'Lord, shall we smite with the sword?' he cries out eagerly, and, without waiting for an answer, he raises his weapon and strikes at one of the high priest's servants, named Malchus, and cuts off his ear. But Jesus would have no blood shed on His behalf. Turning to St. Peter He bids him put up his sword into its sheath. It was His will to drink the cup His Father pressed to His lips. In any case He had no need of earthly weapons. One word of prayer to His Father, and the Heavens would be white with angel legions, and a myriad angel swords would flash in His defence. Stretching out His hand Jesus touched the ear of the wounded man and healed him. And now, seeing their Master meekly yielding Himself up to His enemies, and believing all to be lost, the disciples broke away

and began to scatter in all directions, leaving Jesus alone.

Shortly afterwards, with the light of lanterns and the flare of torches, He is borne away down the slope of Olivet back to Jerusalem.

It was past midnight when Jesus and His escort reached the city. Their first halting-place was at the palace of the high priest Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas. Annas had been deposed by the Romans in favour of his son-in-law, but the Jews still considered him to be the rightful high priest.

After feasting his eyes upon Jesus, the crafty, white-haired, bad-hearted old man, for so he was, sent him across the courtyard to Caiaphas, where Jesus found a gathering of priests and Sadducees waiting to examine Him. They had been sitting up late into the night in the hope of His capture, and now that they saw Him a prisoner, and in their power at last, their eyes glistened and their faces were lighted up with a cruel joy.

With His arms bound behind His back, Jesus faced His judges.

The first question put to Him had to do with His disciples and His teaching, but Jesus refused to be entrapped into answering it. He told the high priest that He had ever spoken openly in the synagogue and the Temple. If an account of His teaching was wanted, let His judges enquire of those who had heard Him teach.

Seeing the eyes of Caiaphas flash with anger at this answer, one of the officers who stood by struck Jesus a cruel blow upon the face, saying, 'Answerest Thou the high priest so?' It was a vile and shameful act, this blow aimed at a defenceless prisoner, yet no one cried shame upon it. Jesus Himself showed no anger. He was ready to endure insult, not to avenge it. Turning

His sad eyes upon the coward who had so cruelly struck Him, He said gently, 'If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou Me?' and we seem to see the man's hand fall to his side.

A band of false witnesses had been got together in the palace, to help swear away Jesus' life. Seeing there was little hope of convicting Him out of His own mouth, they were now brought forward, but they only contradicted one another. At last two false witnesses came forward and said, 'This fellow said, I am able to destroy the Temple of God and to build it in three days.'

Jesus had said something quite different to this, but He did not trouble to deny the charge. 'As a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth.'

Stung to anger by Jesus' continued silence, Caiaphas at last asked sneeringly, yet half fearfully too, 'Art Thou the Christ?' Jesus lifted His head and looked him in the face. 'Thou hast said,' He answered; and then He added, 'Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of Heaven.'

In an instant all is confusion. The face of Caiaphas darkens; he clutches his white priestly robe at the neck and tears it, making the rent which might never afterwards be mended. 'What further need have we of witnesses?' he cries. 'What think ye?' and from the packed benches around him the hoarse murmur swells, 'He is guilty of death.'

Then follows a scene which we do not like to think about or picture to ourselves. Leading Jesus into the open court, and from thence to the guard room, the brutal mob of servants and hangers-on at the palace begin to rain blows upon Him, bound and defenceless as He is. They take a rag and tie it over His eyes, and make game

of Him. They even spit in His face. Dear child, think of it! That beautiful Face which the angels love to gaze upon and adore, marked with the vile proofs of man's hatred and contempt. Yes, let us turn our heads away. How awful to think that sin should have brought the world to this.

Meanwhile there was another trial going on outside—the trial and testing of Simon Peter. St. Peter and St. John had not dared to remain at their Master's side in Gethsemane, and yet their love for Him was too great to allow them to forsake Him altogether. So, while the rest of the disciples fled away, they returned to follow Jesus—though afar off.

The palace which Caiaphas shared with Annas stood on the hill slope, and was reached through an open courtyard which in its turn was guarded by a porch with an iron gate. As the guard passed in through the gate with their prisoner, St. John passed in as well, for he was known to the high priest and had the entry of the palace. Looking round for his friend, St. John found he had been left outside, so he went to the gate and spoke to the portress, and she unbarred the gate to St. Peter, and let him in.

The night was chilly, and the servants and the guards were gathered round a brazier of burning coal which had been lighted in the middle of the court, and were warming themselves. Every one was eagerly discussing the capture of Jesus, and St. Peter drew near to listen. He was sick at heart and full of anxiety for his Master's safety, but he was among enemies and must try to appear indifferent and unconcerned. Only St. Peter was not a good actor. As the red glare of the fire fell upon his face, one of the palace maids, the same maid who had let him in, could not help noticing how disturbed and anxious he looked.

and how restless he seemed to be. 'Art not thou also one of this Man's disciples?' she asked him sharply. Taken by surprise—almost before he knew what he was saying—St. Peter stammered out, 'No, I am not.' Then, as malicious, inquiring faces began to be turned upon him, he shrank away from the tell-tale firelight and went back to the shadows of the porch.

But there was to be no escape for St. Peter that night. Following him into the porch the portress again pointed him out to a group of men standing at the door saying, 'This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth,' and St. Peter, blustering and denying that he ever knew Jesus, moves back to the fire once more, determined to brazen the matter out.

The night by this time was passing into the morning. Faintly in the distance came the sound of cock crowing. St. Peter heard it, but he did not remember Jesus' words as yet. There before the fire he stood, warming his hands at the ruddy blaze and joining in the servants' talk with pretended cheerfulness. But the words of the maid had made them suspicious. They began to tax him with being a follower of Jesus. It was no use his denying it; his rough voice and country accent proclaimed him from Galilee. Worse still, a man from among the crowd steps forward and confronts him. 'I saw him in the garden with Jesus. It is the very man who cut off the ear of my kinsman Malchus.'

At this, terror and rage fought together in St. Peter's heart; he felt that he was trapped. Breaking out into a volley of curses, he cried, 'I know not the Man.'

Just then for a second time he heard the cock crow, and Jesus' words rushed to his mind. He turned, and there was Jesus Himself. He was being led across the courtyard; He had heard every word. He did not say

anything; He just gave St. Peter a look—such a sorrowful, grieved look it was. O Peter!—that was all—but it went through Peter's heart like a sword. 'He was the best friend I ever had, and I have denied and deserted Him just as He said I would do.' And with tears running down his cheeks, Peter rushes out into the night. Only it was to meet the morning, as some one has said.

In the early dawn of the new day a new life began for the apostle who denied his Lord. 'The Angel of Innocence had left him, but the Angel of Repentance took him by the hand.'

St. Clement tells us that to the day of his death St. Peter never forgot that awful night. Always at the hour of his three-fold denial, when the cocks began to crow in the valleys, he would rise, and, humbly kneeling upon his knees, pour out his heart to God in sorrow for his sin. And because he was sorry he won forgiveness. Thank God, because we fall, there is no reason why we should not rise again. And St. Peter rose. He lived to make atonement for his sin. Jesus gave him back his place among the apostles, and by the grace of God he became in the end one of the strongest and bravest characters of the whole Bible—

'The pastoral staff, the Keys of Heaven,
To wield awhile in grey-haired might,
Then from his cross to spring forgiven,
And follow Jesus out of sight.'

And now for a moment let us turn to the false apostle Judas. When the first streaks of the dawn began to brighten the sky, Jesus was once more dragged before His judges. The whole council of the Jews by this time were gathered together in the 'Paved Hall' of the Temple, and formal sentence of death was pronounced against Him.

Judas, like St. Peter, had perhaps been in the palace courtyard, skulking among the shadows, perhaps he had entered with St. John into the trial chamber itself and had seen the blow struck which bruised the cheek of Jesus, and the buffeting and the spitting afterwards. Now the news reaches him that Jesus has been condemned to death. He must have been expecting this, and yet, when he hears the news, a great horror seizes him, he begins at last to realise what he has done, and he is like a man distraught.

There is a picture of Cain washing his bloodstained hands after the murder of Abel. As he bends down to look into the water, he starts back in horror, seeing the mark of murder on his brow. Just in the same way as Judas stooped to look into the dark waters of his soul, God showed him the murder mark there, and the sight appalled him. By this time the Temple gates were opened, and up to the Temple, haggard, wild-eyed, and breathless, he speeds into the presence of the chief priests. 'I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood,' he pants out; but they only turn on him with a snarl and a gibe, 'What is that to us? see thou to that.' That is all the answer he gets from these friends and companions in his crime. And he has sinned, he has sold his soul for this!

Ripping the silver pieces from his girdle he dashes them upon the marble pavement, and with the moan of a lost soul rushes away to seek a suicide's grave, as one who has sinned too deeply to be forgiven. Ah, poor lost Judas! if he had only thrown himself at Jesus' feet instead. That was his one chance, if he had only known it. Jesus would have pardoned him—can we doubt it?—even at the eleventh hour.

But he turned away from God, and therefore God

could not help him. So he died, and went 'to his own place.'

In Venice they show you a long line of pictures, the portraits of the merchant princes who ruled as Doges or Dukes of Venice. One space in the long line of pictures is vacant, and a black curtain hangs before it. There once hung the picture of one who proved false to his country. So in the picture gallery of the New Testament hang the pictures of 'the glorious company of the apostles,' and there is one blank space left there as well. It is the place which was once filled by Judas, who sold his Master for thirty pieces of silver.

V

THE TRIAL BEFORE PILATE

IT was now morning. Jerusalem lay bathed in the beautiful half tints and misty colours of the early dawn. Outside the city walls rose the song of the birds; the lambs were leaping in the fields, and, sprinkled over the meadows, the sweet spring flowers were everywhere opening their coloured cups to greet the rising sun. Thrust into a dark room, bruised, bound with cords, and worn out with watching and want of sleep, Jesus awaited His judges' will.

Although they had condemned Him to death, the Jewish Council were unable to carry out the sentence they had pronounced. The power of life and death had passed into the hands of Rome. The next step, therefore, was to carry Jesus before Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor.

Pilate was at this time lodged in the beautiful palace of Herod on the hill. He had come up from Cæsarea to Jerusalem, with a host of soldiers at his back, in order to be at hand to quell any riot that might arise among the Jews, during the time of the Passover.

Every Roman official was hateful to the Jews, but Pilate was especially hateful. He was a man of haughty temper, and of proud, high-handed ways. More than once he had done his best to offend and hurt the religious

feelings of the people. He had allowed his soldiers to carry the silver eagles of the Roman legions through the streets of Jerusalem, an act which had aroused such anger that for nearly a week, we are told, the Jews besieged his doors day and night, until he gave orders for the hateful emblems to be removed. At another time he had goaded the people to fury by hanging up in his palace a number of gilded shields inscribed with the names of heathen gods. Then again, when he wanted money to build an aqueduct to supply Jerusalem with water, he had seized the sacred money of the Treasury to pay for it. On the Jews breaking out in passionate revolt, he had sent soldiers among the rioters with daggers under their garments, with orders to hack at and slay all who came in their way, and so had dispersed the mob.

No wonder the Jews hated Pilate; he did not understand their ways, he did not care to understand them. Already complaints as to his conduct had been lodged at Rome. People were hoping and praying for his downfall. Such was the man before whom Jesus was now to stand, to be judged by him and to judge him in His turn. Starting from the house of Caiaphas, the band of chief priests and elders, accompanied by a gathering mob of the people, set out for the Prætorium, as the Judgment Hall of Pilate was called, and thronging up on the palace steps began to clamour for Pilate to come out and do justice upon their prisoner. Presently the doors of the Prætorium are flung wide open, and Pilate, cold, dignified, cynical, comes out, surrounded by a glittering train of soldiers, and surveys the crowd with a contemptuous stare. If the Jews hated Pilate, he cordially hated and despised them in return.

In front of the Prætorium there was a raised, moveable platform, inlaid with coloured stones, called 'the Pave-

ment,' from which the Roman Governor was accustomed to deliver judgment. Upon this Pilate's curule chair of ivory is placed, and he takes his seat.

'What is the charge?' he asks. For answer, Jesus is thrust before him, and the voices of the chief priests are raised, demanding that He should be put to death.

But Pilate was not a butcher; he was a Roman judge, and it was not the way of the Romans to condemn a man to death unheard.

'What is the Man's crime?' he asks. The chief priests answer insolently, 'If He were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered Him up unto thee.' A malefactor? Pilate looks curiously at the Figure before him—the pale, frail Figure with the torn robe and the poet's brow.

He shrugs his shoulders. 'Take Him and judge Him for yourselves,' he answers, making as though he would rise. This was evidently no case for Rome to trouble about.

But Pilate must be made to understand that the case had to do with Rome in a very special way. Jesus, urged the chief priests, was a dangerous character. He had stirred up the people, He had forbidden them to give tribute to Cæsar, He had dared to call Himself a King.

Well, this at any rate is a charge which must be looked into. Pilate orders Jesus to be brought into the Prætorium for examination. There, in the great empty hall, they faced one another, the Prisoner and His judge.

Pilate's keen eye rested upon Jesus' drooping figure and worn white face. 'Art thou the King of the Jews?' he asked at last—'thou poor, despised, sad, suffering Man?' And Jesus answers, 'My Kingdom is not of this world. If My Kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now is My Kingdom not from hence.'

My Kingdom? 'Art Thou a King, then?' Pilate asks again; and Jesus answers, 'Thou sayest that I am a King. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth My voice.'

Truth? What was truth? Pilate wondered. He wished he knew.

This was a strange Man. How calm and steadfast His eyes were; how gently, and yet with what quiet dignity He spoke. There was something about Him which Pilate could not understand. Of one thing, however, he was quite sure; Jesus might be a Dreamer of dreams, but He was no criminal. Pilate would not have Him thrown to the wolves if he could help it.

Coming out to the crowd he tells them that he finds no fault in the Man.

At this the storm breaks out. The chief priests are furious. 'He stirreth up the people from Galilee to Jerusalem,' they cry, and the crowd around the Prætorium steps begins to growl and mutter, and show signs of growing anger.

Pilate sees his task is likely to prove difficult. He does not want another riot. What a difficult, unmanageable people these Jews were. Suddenly he catches at the word 'Galilee.' King Herod of Galilee was at this very time at Jerusalem. Why not send Jesus to be judged by him? Pilate was on bad terms with Herod just then, and it would be a clever stroke. It would pay the king a compliment, and rid himself of the responsibility of dealing with Jesus, at the same time. So Pilate tells off a guard to accompany Jesus and His accusers to Herod's Court.

Herod's weak, crafty face lighted up with pleasure when he saw Jesus. He had often heard of Him and of

His miracles. Here was a chance perhaps of seeing a miracle performed. Eagerly he began to question Jesus, but Jesus answered him nothing. He would not deign to speak one word to this bad-hearted, evil-living man, the murderer of His friend.

So, too, when pressing forward, the chief priests and elders began to pour out their charges against Jesus, still He answered nothing. He stood there facing His accusers with grave, attentive eyes, quite silently, Himself judging those furious, wicked men who would fain have been His judges.

At last, angry and disappointed, Herod turns away. Jesus had treated him with disdain; he would revenge himself by holding Jesus up to ridicule. At his command the servants bring forth one of his cast-off royal robes. They throw it around Jesus, and the base king encourages his men-at-arms to make sport of the Impostor, the Man who laid claim to be King of the Jews, and was but a sorry King of 'shreds and patches.' Then, muffled in this mock royal robe, Jesus is sent back again to Pilate, with Herod's compliments; and the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together.

And so Pilate finds Jesus on his hands again; his clever stroke has come to nothing. He must decide the case himself after all. But how? Jesus, he is sure, is innocent, and yet he dares not release Him, because he is afraid of getting into trouble; at the same time, since He is innocent, he hates the thought of giving Him up to die. Was there no way out of the difficulty? Yes, there was one way—the way of doing right, at whatever cost, but Pilate was not strong enough to take it. As weak men do in times of difficulty he hesitated, he tried to find some half-way house of shelter for his conscience. He tells the crowd who have begun to clamour afresh for Jesus' death

that he is persuaded of His innocence, and that Herod is evidently of his opinion as well; yet the Man shall be punished; orders shall be given for Him to be scourged and then set free.

But it was death, not scourging, on which Christ's enemies were set, and the storm of rage breaks out afresh. Pilate is at his wits' end.

To add to his uneasiness and perplexity, as he takes his seat once more upon his ivory chair, his wife, Claudia, sends him a message, imploring him not to condemn Jesus, 'that just Man,' as she calls Him, because of a strange and awful dream she had had about Him, 'in the morning hour when dreams come true.'

Pilate, like most Romans, was superstitious about dreams, and now more than ever he shrank back from the dreadful deed he was asked to commit. He will try another plan, he thinks. It was the custom at Passover time for the Governor to free a Jewish prisoner in honour of the feast. Now there was a robber chieftain lying in prison at the time, a daring, desperate character, Barabbas by name, who had headed a revolt against the Roman power, and was now awaiting sentence of death.

Recalling to the minds of the mob the old custom, Pilate asked them which of the two prisoners, Jesus or Barabbas, they would have him set free; the fierce robber whose hands were dyed with blood, or the gentle Teacher who claimed to be their King. There could only be one answer to such a question as this, he thinks; but Pilate had counted without the chief priests and the elders. Instantly they are at work among the crowd urging the people to demand the release of Barabbas. Crowds are only too easily swayed. When Pilate therefore repeats his question, he is met with the hoarse shout of, 'Not this Man, but Barabbas.' 'What shall I do then with Jesus

which is called Christ?' he asks, and the cry goes up, 'Crucify Him, crucify Him.'

Pilate had now come to the narrow place where there was no room to turn either to the right hand or to the left. Calling for a basin of water he washes his hands, and holding them up dripping wet before the people, he cries in a loud voice, 'I am innocent of the blood of this just person; see ye to it.' Then all the people made this awful answer, 'His blood be on us, and on our children.'

Ah, it was easy for Pilate to wash his hands, but soap and water will not wash out the stain of guilt. Never again as long as he lived would Pilate's hands be clean. Already in God's eyes they were dyed a dreadful red. He was meditating a sin which all the washing in the world would never wash away.

We can hardly imagine a more terrible example of moral weakness than Pilate presents. He knew the right, yet he was afraid to follow it. In his anxiety to avoid trouble he sent an innocent man to his death. And what did he gain by it after all? Like Judas, he sinned for nothing. Pilate's after history may be summed up in three words—disgrace, banishment, suicide.

Among the peasants of Switzerland there is a belief that still to-day his ghost may be seen walking on Mount Pilatus ceaselessly washing its hands. That is just the picture of Pilate we carry away with us as we read the story of the Passion. Ever we seem to see him washing his hands, in the vain effort to escape responsibility. But it clings to him all the same; the stain of his sin remains; he can never rid himself of it. And so, having proclaimed Jesus' innocence, the Governor gives way at last.

The order goes forth that Jesus is to be scourged, and then led to the Cross. And now the terrible Roman whip with its weighted leather thongs is brought out, and Jesus



THE CROWN OF THORNS

is hurried away to endure its agony. The criminal condemned to be scourged was stripped and tied to a post. So savagely was he beaten that he often died under the lash. This awful punishment Jesus bore without a murmur. Afterwards the soldiers led Him into the guardroom, and began to while away an idle hour by holding a mock coronation.

Rough and pitiless indeed must the hearts of these Roman soldiers have been, to find pleasure in making fun of a half-dying man, yet the whole band, we read, took part in this dreadful work.

Tearing off Herod's robe, all torn and blood-stained now, and catching up some old cast-off military cloak, they throw it over Jesus' shoulders in mockery of the royal purple. One of the soldiers tears a spray of acanthus thorn from some neighbouring garden hedge, and, plaiting it into a wreath, forces it upon His brow. Another cuts a reed and places it in His hand to serve Him for a sceptre. Soldiers and servants come crowding round, bending the knee before Him and crying with mocking voices, 'Hail, King of the Jews!'

At last they tire of their game. They take the sceptre from His hand and strike Him on the head; the servants spit at Him. . . .

And all the while Jesus never uttered a word. Pale, silent, suffering, He sat in His kingly robes, looking at His persecutors with dim, sorrowful eyes—not hating, only pitying, praying for them.

'The Lord is King and hath put on glorious apparel: the Lord hath put on His apparel and girded Himself with strength.' Dear child, how easy it would have been for Him to have slain these wicked men with a breath of His lips, but instead He willed to shed His blood to save them.

Then Pilate comes in, and the noise and clamour immediately die down. His eye falls on the figure of the patient, thorn-crowned Christ, and a sudden wave of pity sweeps over him. He must make another effort to save His life, he thinks. Let Jesus be led, just as He is, on to the great steps of the Prætorium where all can see Him, is his order. 'Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe.' Standing by His side and pointing at Him, Pilate cries out 'Ecce homo'— 'Behold the man.' Surely the sight of that brave, patient, outraged Figure will move even the wolfish hearts of these vile Jews to pity. O vain thought! it only seems to rouse them to greater frenzy. 'Crucify Him, crucify Him,' swells the savage cry. The mob presses forward with ugly menacing gestures; it almost looks as if they would rush the palace. Pale and angry, Pilate flings back the retort, 'Take ye Him and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him.' The chief priests answer, 'We have a law, and by our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God.'

Pilate's heart sank. No doubt he had read in heathen poetry that the gods came down to earth sometimes. Was this the Son of God?

Returning to the Prætorium he called Jesus to him. 'Whence art Thou?' he asked half fearfully. Jesus made no answer; He only looked at Pilate. How that look stung; it was not an angry look, but there was a touch of severity in it, there was reproach; it seemed to search Pilate through and through. He began to bluster. 'Speakest Thou not unto me? Knowest Thou not that I have power to crucify Thee, and have power to release Thee?' Jesus answered, 'Thou couldst have no power at all against Me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered Me unto thee hath the greater sin.'



CHRIST BEFORE PILATE

Perplexed, harassed, driven, Pilate makes one last desperate effort to save Jesus and win back his self-respect. Leading Him forth once more; 'Behold your King,' he cries, as though, having appealed in vain to their pity, he would now shame them with their own folly, by bidding them gaze on the kind of man who was to thrust Cæsar from his throne. But the shouts of 'Crucify' still continue.

'Shall I crucify your King?' asks Pilate in tones of scorn; and the answer comes, 'We have no king but Cæsar. If thou let this Man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend; whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Cæsar.'

This decided Pilate. He knew the pretended loyalty of the people to Cæsar was a farce, but he knew it was in the power of the chief priests to get him into trouble at Rome by misrepresenting his words, and so poisoning the mind of the Emperor against him. The thought terrified him—it might mean disgrace, perhaps even death. Jesus must be sacrificed. He was sorry, but there was no help for it, and so the order is given to a soldier to get ready the Cross. Rough hands strip Jesus of His poor finery; His own clothes are huddled upon His back. Then the great door of the Prætorium opens once more; for an instant He stands in full view of the people; then He descends the steps and begins His journey along the Sorrowful Way, to the place which is called Calvary.

VI

CALVARY

THERE is a poem by a great poet, called 'The Patriot,' in which the story is told of a man who by his brave deeds and splendid heroism had made himself the idol of his countrymen. The day of his triumph has come, and as he enters his native city, the whole place is ablaze with enthusiasm. Banners are hung out, trumpets peal, the drums roll and the people shout.

'It was roses, roses, all the way,
With myrtle mixed in my path like mad ;
The house-roofs seemed to heave and sway,
The church-spires flamed, such flags they had,
A year ago on this very day.'

The people, he says, would have given him the sun out of the sky had he asked for it.

A year passes by, and how changed the scene ! He is going out of the city now instead of entering in. There are no flags, no drums and trumpets, and no cheering crowds. He walks on foot in the rain ; a rope cuts his wrist ; his forehead is bleeding from the blow of a stone ; the people who follow him to the scaffold hoot and jeer at him.

'Thus I entered, and thus I go !
In triumphs, people have dropped down dead.
"Paid by the world, What dost thou owe
Me ?"—God might question. Now instead,
'Tis God shall repay : I am safer so.'

How like the story of this patriot is the story of Jesus. Barely a week had passed by since He rode through the streets of Jerusalem. He had been received in triumph; the air had thundered with the cry of 'Hosanna'; palm branches had been waved and garments strewn in the way.

Now He passes through the same streets on His way to the Cross. He has been condemned to die the death of the murderer and the thief, and the very people who then shouted 'Hosanna' now greet Him with jeers and insults. Yesterday He was hailed as King, to-day He is derided as a malefactor.

The Way of the Cross! Picture the sad procession as it winds its way out of the great square in front of the Prætorium. The sky above is blue; the narrow streets are flooded with brilliant sunlight and crowded with eager sightseers. The news has spread that Jesus is being led forth to die, and the whole city has come out to see Him pass.

Clearing a way through the crowd, first comes a centurion on horseback, then follow a troop of soldiers in glittering armour. Behind them, guarded by more soldiers, comes Jesus. Slung upon His shoulders are two heavy pieces of wood which are to form the cross-beams of His Cross. His face is pale and worn with suffering; His long white robe is stained with blood; around His neck He carries a board with His accusation written upon it.

By His side walk two highwaymen, condemned to die like Himself, and, like Himself, weighed down beneath the burden of their crosses. In the rear surge the mixed rabble of the square, their throats hoarse with the cry of 'Crucify Him.'

Jostled by the brutal soldiery, and followed by the

jeers and reproaches of the crowd, Jesus toils wearily along. At last, worn out with pain and suffering, and fainting beneath His heavy Cross, He sinks exhausted to the ground, and though rough hands raise Him to His feet and place the wooden beams once more upon His bent and weary shoulders, it is found that He has no strength to carry them.

The Cross was the instrument of shame, the gallows of its day, and no Roman soldier would touch it. Yet some one must be found to carry it in Jesus' stead. What was to be done? Just then a stranger passed by, a man of dusky face and foreign garb, coming in from the country. His name was Simon, and he was from Cyrene in Africa. As he stops to gaze pityingly on the crushed and fainting figure of Jesus, the soldiers seize him and, in spite of his protests, bind the Cross upon his back. How unwillingly Simon must have borne that load at first, we can well imagine; and yet if, as it seems, he afterwards became Jesus' disciple, the recollection of the help he gave his Master in His hour of need would become one of his dearest memories. St. Mark tells us that Simon was the father of two well-known Christians, Alexander and Rufus, and so it would certainly appear that, as a reward for carrying Jesus' Cross upon his shoulders, Jesus gave him the Cross to carry in his heart.

Following Jesus at a distance were a number of women of the city, some of whom, it may be, He had helped and blessed in days gone by; women whose sons and husbands He had healed, and whose little children He had taken up in His arms. Distressed at the sight of His sufferings and at the thought of His coming death, they were beating their breasts and weeping bitter tears.

Jesus, forgetting His own pains in the thought of the suffering that these poor women themselves must soon

endure, turned to them with words of love and pity. He bade them weep not for Him, but rather weep for themselves and for their children. An awful doom overhung the city ; when it fell it would spare neither mother nor little innocent child.

Jesus would have none to shed tears over His sufferings but only over those sins which were the cause of His sufferings.

Passing out of the Damascus gate, the procession comes at length to Calvary—the place of a skull, as the word means—a rising slope lying beyond the city wall. Here a halt is called. The soldiers clear a space ; a great hole is dug in the ground to hold the upright beam which is to form part of Jesus' Cross. Then the cross-beams are laid upon the ground, and Simon is set free at last.

There was a guild of pious women, we are told, at Jerusalem who were accustomed to provide a goblet of strong wine mingled with myrrh for the unhappy criminals to drink, in order to deaden their pains as they hung upon the Cross. A cup of this wine was offered to Jesus, but He just put His lips to it and turned His head away. He would not escape a single pang of the suffering His Father had given Him to bear ; He would meet the King of Terrors with clear, unclouded mind, no matter in what dreadful form he came.

And now four soldiers approach. They seize Jesus, and with rough hands strip Him of His garments ; they then throw Him to the ground and stretch His arms along the beam of the Cross. There is a sound of hammering heard ; they have nailed one of His hands to the wood. Then more blows from the hammer and the other hand is nailed. Then they hoist the beam and fasten it in its place, and as Jesus hangs upon the Cross a

great iron spike is driven through His feet. And so the King comes to His throne.

See how the nail has torn the hand that even on the Cross is raised in blessing—the hand that healed the blind, that touched the leper's dreadful brow, that rested with loving touch on the sunny heads of the little children. Look how the blood is trickling from those feet that were never weary of going about doing good. They are the feet that Mary washed with her tears, and dried with her unloosened hair. They have carried the Good Shepherd after many a poor, lost, wandering sheep upon the mountains. Now they are held fast to the Cross; their work of loving ministry is at an end. Dear child, does not the sight of Jesus dying on the Cross help us to see what a terrible thing sin must be, since nothing less than the death of God's own Son could avail for its forgiveness? Does it not teach us the value God sets upon our souls, since, to save those souls the King of Glory must give up His very life?

And now Jesus speaks, 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.' It is a prayer for mercy for His murderers, for the brutal soldiers that were putting Him to death, for the thoughtless crowd that made holiday on Calvary, for all sinners to the end of the world. Jesus spoke seven times as He hung upon the Cross, and each word is like a window through which we may look into His loving heart. 'Pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you,' He had taught His disciples on the mountain; now He teaches the same lesson over again, this time by His holy example. The insults and injuries of His enemies filled Him with a great sorrow, but they were powerless to move Him to anger. His heart was like a garden, spread with sweet flowers of pity and forgiveness, gentle-

ness and love. There was no room in it for bitterness or revenge.

Stretched at the foot of the Cross, the four soldiers who were on guard now began to divide Jesus' clothing among themselves. He had little to leave behind Him when He came to die, just His worn white outer robe, His leather sandals and girdle, the covering for His head, and His inner garment. The inner garment was a prize, and so they kept it till last. It was of good material, and woven in one piece. Perhaps it was His mother's work, perhaps the loving offering of the women who followed Him from Galilee. It seemed a pity to tear it into four pieces. To get out of the difficulty one of the soldiers produces a couple of dice: he drops them into his brass helmet and the coveted prize is diced away. How little these soldiers dreamed they were fulfilling a prophecy which had been spoken many hundreds of years before of Christ: 'They parted My raiment among them, and for My vesture they did cast lots.' Yet so it was. Then sitting down they watched Him there with eyes which looked, and yet saw—nothing.

It was the Roman custom to place at the head of the cross a tablet, setting forth the crime for which the man below was suffering death. Pilate could find no fault in Jesus, and so there was no crime placarded against Him on the Cross. Instead, the tablet bore this inscription, 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.' The title was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin, and Pilate wrote it at God's dictation though he did not know it. It was a reminder that the message of the Gospel should be preached to people of all tongues throughout the world.

Imagine the rage of the chief priests and the elders as, gathering round the Cross to gloat over Jesus' suffer-

ings, they saw these words above His head, reflecting on themselves. In haste they send a message to Pilate: 'Write not, The King of the Jews; but that He said, I am King of the Jews.' But it was with the very purpose of wounding the chief priests and elders that Pilate had written the title. It was his revenge upon them for forcing him against his will to condemn an innocent man: 'What I have written I have written,' he answers curtly, and there is a gleam in his eye which warns them to leave well alone. What a sad pity that Pilate's determination to be firm was not taken a little earlier!

It was nine o'clock in the morning when Jesus was led forth to the pain of the Cross. There on the Cross He hung, slowly dying, for six long, weary hours. 'We may not know, we cannot tell, the pains He had to bear.' When our loved ones die, we do all we can to make their last hours easy for them. Loving hands smooth the dying pillow, loving voices murmur in the dying ear, all the offices that love can render are freely paid. But it was different with Jesus on His death-bed. The hot sun beat down upon His unsheltered head; His only pillow was the splintered Cross, and instead of voices of love and tenderness, He heard nothing but cries of mockery and hate. The soldiers mocked Him, lifting their wine-cups to His lips as though to give Him drink, and then snatching them away again. The two robbers who hung on each side of Him reviled Him. The idle mob of holiday-makers taunted Him with the cry: 'Ah, Thou that destroyest the Temple, and buildest it in three days, save Thyself. If Thou be the Son of God, come down from the Cross.' The chief priests and elders said with a sneer: 'He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He be the King of Israel, let Him

now come down from the Cross, and we will believe Him.'

Yet through it all not one murmur of impatience came from the lips of Jesus; He made no reply to His tormentors. How easy it would have been for Him to have come down from the Cross had He willed it! At a word, the angels that hovered over Him would have loosened the nails and set Him free, but He would not speak it. It was not the nails, it was the strong cord of His great love for us that held Him fast; He gave Himself up to die, a willing Sacrifice, since by His death alone could He win forgiveness for our sins and bring us home to God.

I have said that the robbers who were crucified with Jesus reviled Him like the rest. Presently, however, one of them becomes silent. Something—perhaps it was the beautiful patience and meekness that Jesus showed, perhaps it was the prayer He uttered for His murderers—touches his heart. God opens those poor, blind, sin-blurred eyes of his, and he sees in the patient figure hanging at his side the form of one like unto the Son of God. The King of the Jews? What if He were really King, the very Christ whom God had sent to be the Saviour of the world? If so, may there not be a chance even for him? 'Lord,' he says, with eager, tremulous voice, turning his dying eyes to Jesus, 'remember me when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom.' And Jesus heard his prayer; He looked at the poor robber and read the sorrow at his heart for his wasted, misspent, sinful life; He weighed the wonderful faith that did not stumble even at the Cross, and He rewarded it. Swiftly the beautiful promise comes: 'Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise,' and before the darkened sun went down Jesus had kept His word.

'The sun was low in the changing west,
The shadows were heavy from hill and tree,
When the watchman opened the Gate of Rest,
"I am willing with all My heart," said He.'

Amid the wilderness of malice and hate that spread about the Cross, there was one little patch of love growing bravely at its foot. Close to the Cross of Jesus stood His mother, and by her side, Jesus' first friend, St. John. There, too, were His mother's sister, Mary, the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. Love had drawn the little group of mourners to the Cross, love kept them there as the long sad hours dragged slowly by, love which many waters cannot quench.

As she kept watch at the Cross, looking up at her dying Son with piteous face and tear-dimmed eyes, did Mary think of those words which the aged Simeon had spoken long ago in the Temple as he took her little Child in his arms, 'A sword shall pierce through thy own soul also'? She must often have wondered what those words meant. Poor, stricken, suffering Mary, how clearly in the light of Jesus' Cross she read their meaning now!

Jesus looked down upon His mother with His fading eyes. She was in agony and He longed to comfort her. How would she fare when left to face the hard, cold world alone? From Mary His eyes travelled to St. John, faithful friend, brave, true-hearted, loving disciple. He joined their hands together by a look. 'Behold thy son,' He said to His mother, and then to the dear disciple, 'Behold thy mother,' and from that hour, Mary, the mother of Jesus, passed into the safe keeping and tender care of 'the disciple whom Jesus loved.'

It was the third hour of Jesus' agony, and now a strange and awful thing happened. It was high noon when, suddenly, the light faded from the heavens, and



JESUS ON THE CROSS

a thick darkness swept down upon Calvary. Every moment the gloom deepened; the disc of the sun showed blood-red against the sky; the birds ceased singing, the voices of the busy mockers were hushed, and the crowd began to melt away in terror and dismay.

For three hours there was this strange darkness, and all the while Jesus hung in silence on the Cross. Then from His dying lips came an awful cry, 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani—My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' It was the cry of a breaking heart. The agony of the nails, the scorching heat, the cruel mockery and the scorn, He had borne them all without a murmur. But now it was God's will to lay a burden upon Him which seemed beyond His strength to carry. The sins of the world which He bore upon His shoulders rose up like a great wall of separation between Himself and God. He felt deserted and forsaken by His Father, and that just when He needed the comfort of His Presence most. He was like some strong swimmer, sinking exhausted beneath the waves, who stretches out his hand to clutch the saving rope, and grasps—nothing.

'Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of Thy water-spouts: all Thy waves and Thy billows are gone over me.'

Dear child, Jesus was never nearer to His Father's loving heart than when He hung upon the Cross, yet as the punishment of sin is separation from God, in bearing our sins He willed to feel forsaken. It was for our sakes that He endured this crowning agony. 'He suffered darkness and death, that He might turn death into life, and darkness into light.'

By and by the darkness rolls away; the sun shines once more on Calvary, and light comes once more to the darkened soul of Jesus. And now from the white,

parched lips of the dying Christ come the words, 'I thirst.'

Hearing the awful cry that came just before, some of those who stood near the Cross said to one another, 'He is calling for Elias.'

Now, one of the soldiers, touched with pity, and heedless of his companions' cry, 'Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save Him,' ran and dipped a sponge in the soldiers' jar of sour wine by the Cross and pressed it to Jesus' lips. It was the one act of mercy amid the many acts of cruelty at the Cross, and Jesus accepted it, and, we may believe, blessed it. Who this nameless soldier was we do not know—but God knows, and when Jesus, on whom He had pity, comes to take account of His servants, we may be sure that he will in no wise lose his reward.

Then when Jesus had received the wine He cried with a glad voice, 'It is finished.' Yes, it was over at last—all the shame and the reproach, all the bitter anguish and the torture, all the sadness and the tears!

The journey was at an end, that hard journey along life's rugged road which He had come to tread in order that we might tread it after Him with better courage. His atoning work was at an end, the sacrifice had been offered up, the debt of sin had been paid, the world had been brought back again to God. There was a verse from one of the old Psalms of David that every Jewish mother used to teach her little child to repeat before he lay down to rest at night. Jesus, as He knelt at Mary's knee in the little home of Nazareth, had always added it to His prayers. Now He repeated it for the last time, 'Father,' He said, 'into Thy hands I commend My spirit.' Then His head fell; He died with the Child's Prayer upon His lips.

'Lord, on the Cross Thine Arms were stretched
To draw Thy people nigh.
Oh grant us then that Cross to love,
And in those Arms to die.'

The Bible tells us of some strange and wonderful things which happened at Jesus' death. An earthquake tore the rocks of Calvary, the graves were opened, and the dead arose and went out into the open streets. Afar at Jerusalem it was the time of the evening sacrifice. As the priests gathered in the Temple, fear and consternation sat on every face. The great Babylonian curtain, which divided the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies, had been found rent completely in twain across its many-coloured, gold-embroidered folds.

Had they only known it, the tearing of the curtain was a sign sent from God. The Temple had done its work; the day of barriers between God and man was past. Jesus by His death had opened the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers.

Wonder and fear fought together in the hearts of the soldiers, as the solid earth shook and trembled beneath their feet when Jesus died. The centurion had kept watch beneath many a cross before, but never had he seen a death like this. The power of the Cross began to work upon him. It drew him over to Jesus' side. 'Truly this man,' he said solemnly, 'was the Son of God.'

The law of Moses commanded that the bodies of those who had been hanged upon a tree should be taken down and buried before sunset. The Jews, therefore, came to Pilate with the request that, after the cruel fashion of those days, the legs of the dying men on Calvary might be broken, and their bodies taken away. Pilate gave

them leave, and presently a fresh company of soldiers set out for Calvary to carry out the governor's orders.

So the legs of the robbers were broken, and the soul of the sufferer who turned to Jesus on the Cross went to join the King in the beautiful garden of Paradise.

But when the soldiers came to Jesus they saw that He was already dead, and so they did not use their cruel mallet upon Him. One of the soldiers, however, reached up, and with his spear pierced the Saviour's side, 'and forthwith came there out blood and water.' There was a deep meaning in this wonder. It was a sign that Jesus did not see corruption, but that even in death He was the Lord of life.

There was a band of faithful women and other friends of Jesus keeping watch a little distance from the Cross, waiting to see what would become of their Master's body. It hurt them sorely to think of that dear lifeless form being roughly handled, and perhaps cast into some dreadful pit, unhonoured and unwept. If only they might carry it away!

Perhaps among these watchers by the Cross stood Joseph of Arimathea, one of the members of the Jewish Council. (When the sun goes down the stars begin to come out.) He was a good and holy man, and a disciple of Jesus, though hitherto, through fear of the Jews, he had not dared to confess Him openly. Now, however, the Cross begins to draw him, just as it had drawn the centurion, and he who had not the courage to confess Christ before men when He was alive, now that He is dead, goes boldly to Pilate and begs the body of the Lord.

Pilate, having learned from the centurion that Jesus was really dead, gave Joseph leave to take away the body. Then Joseph, having bought fine linen for the

burial, returns to Calvary. There, at the Cross, he finds another secret follower of Jesus. This was Nicodemus, who first came to Jesus by night. Suffering and sorrow are written on his face, for he too has lost a friend, and the bitter thought keeps rising in his heart, 'I might have played a nobler part and served my Master better.'

Nicodemus had brought a great weight of spices to embalm the body of his Lord. Together the two friends lower the Cross to the ground; they draw out the iron spikes from the hands and feet of Jesus, and reverently bathe the cruel wounds which the nails and spear have made. Very tenderly and gently they do their work, though Jesus is beyond the reach of pain and suffering now. Then they wrap His body in the fine linen with sweet-smelling spices, and bear it away to burial.

There was a garden near Calvary which belonged to Joseph, and in it a new tomb which had been cut out of the solid rock. There the body of Jesus is laid to rest, among the flowers that He loved. It was growing dusk. The rays of the setting sun were striking slantwise through the leafy branches of the trees. Nothing more could be done now, as the Sabbath day was fast drawing on. Rolling the great round flat stone into its place before the mouth of the cave, Joseph and Nicodemus went slowly and sadly back to Jerusalem.

In the garden a holy peace seemed to brood. All was quiet. By and by, like tall tapers lighted by the angels at the repose of Jesus, the stars began to shine out one by one. The gloom and darkness of Good Friday had passed at last into the starry brightness of Easter Eve.

BOOK IV

THE GLORY BEYOND

‘ Like a meteor, large and bright,
Fell a golden seed of light
On the field of Christmas night
 When the Babe was born ;
Then ’twas sepulchred in gloom
Till above His holy tomb
Flashed its everlasting bloom—
 Flower of Easter morn.’

I

THE FIRST EASTER DAWN—THE JOURNEY TO EMMAUS— JESUS APPEARS TO HIS DISCIPLES IN THE UPPER ROOM

DAY is dawning, the day of quiet rest. In the rock-hewn tomb of Joseph, surrounded by its leafy shrubs and sweet-smelling flowers, the body of Jesus rests. How little rest He had while He was alive! Who ever worked so hard as Jesus did? Now rest comes after labour, and He finds it in a garden grave. 'In a garden the first Adam lost his rest; in a garden the second Adam finds His, at last.'

What a day of gloom and sadness that Sabbath day must have been for Jesus' friends! Their joy in life was gone; their sun had set; no star of hope shone through their cypress-trees; all was darkness and despair and bitter, unavailing sorrow.

The holy women had followed the body of their Lord on its way to the grave, and had then returned home to prepare spices and ointments to complete the embalming which Joseph and Nicodemus had begun. Their sad thoughts were all of death; they had forgotten Jesus' promise that on the third day He would rise again from the dead. But Jesus' enemies had not forgotten. Though they had won their triumph, a new fear had begun to vex and harass them. What if Jesus were to keep His word? Or,—if that were unlikely—what if His disciples should

pretend He had kept it, and, under cover of night, steal into the garden and bear away His body, and give out that He had risen? Going to Pilate, the chief priests and Pharisees beg that a guard may be set over Joseph's tomb, that so it may be made sure until the third day.

Was he never to be rid of this Jesus, Pilate wonders? With a shrug of his shoulders he bids them take a guard of soldiers and make the sepulchre as sure as they can.

Presently as the Sabbath draws near its end, the quiet of Joseph's garden is broken by the tramp of armed men. A band of Roman soldiers make their way through the trees; they halt in front of Jesus' grave. Across the great stone disc that closes its entrance they stretch a cord, sealing it at each end with the seal of the Roman Governor, to tamper with which meant death.

Once more darkness falls, and the stars come out. The soldiers light a fire. Seated on the ground, with their arms piled around them, they keep their watch during the long silent hours of the night. Nothing happens until towards morning, and then an awful, startling thing takes place. Suddenly the earth begins to tremble and shake, and as they start up in alarm the soldiers see a wondrous sight. A flash of dazzling light illumines the darkness, and, in a burst of glory, an angel of God descends from Heaven and rolls away the stone from the door of the sepulchre. Stunned and blinded the soldiers fall to the ground like dead men. The tomb is empty; the body of Jesus is gone!

Afar off a sorrowful little company of women are making their way to Calvary through the city gate, bearing in their hands perfumes and spices, to perform the last sad offices of love for Him whose death had left them desolate.

As they draw to the garden a sudden fear chills their



THE RESURRECTION

hearts. They had forgotten the great round stone in front of Jesus' grave. There before them they seem to see it, looming in the darkness, shutting them off hopelessly, as it seemed, from the dead body of their Lord.

'Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?' they inquire anxiously of one another. But even as they speak, the darkness lifts, and in the dim light of the early dawn they see that the stone, which they feared they could not move, had been rolled away. The seal was broken, the guard was fled.

Upon this, Mary Magdalene breaks away from the other women and runs swiftly back to Jerusalem, to tell St. Peter and St. John what had happened. Meanwhile, wondering and astonished, Mary the wife of Cleopas, with Salome, Joanna, and the rest, approach the tomb's mouth. They bend down to look into it, and they see that Jesus' body is no longer there.

And yet the grave is not altogether empty. Gradually out of the gloom of the cave grow the lovely forms of two angels. They are clothed in silver, and their shining wings are tipped with the rosy colours of the dawn. As the women fall down with their faces to the earth, one of the angels speaks, bidding them lay aside their fears, for he has been sent to bring them glad tidings of Jesus' Resurrection. 'Fear not ye,' come his words, 'for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.' Oh, when had angel ever before brought sad, aching hearts such glad tidings as these?

Hastily rising to their feet, their faces bright with a new and Heavenly joy, the women leave their spices at the grave, and depart in haste to bring the news to the disciples.

Now St. Peter and St. John were sitting together in their humble lodging, waiting with dull, aching hearts for another dawn to break, when Mary Magdalene burst in upon them. 'They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre,' she cries in breathless tones, 'and we know not where they have laid Him.'

No sooner do they hear this unexpected news than the disciples at once start up and begin to run towards the garden grave. As they ran, St. John, who was the younger of the two, outdistanced his friend, and came to the sepulchre first. By this time the sun was up, and the garden with its blossoming trees and beds of odorous lilies lay green and beautiful beneath the early morning light. By the tomb-side lay the great stone, just as Mary had said, and St. John as he stooped down to look into the grave could see the linen clothes in which Jesus' body had been wrapped, lying all undisturbed upon their rocky shelf, but the body itself had gone.

Another moment and St. Peter comes up. He is too full of wonder to remain standing outside the tomb; he must needs go in, and see for himself, and try to unveil the mystery. And so he enters the cave and stands looking eagerly around him. There lie the linen clothes which St. John had already seen, and, rolled a little apart, the white cloth which had been folded around Jesus' head. It was just as it had been left—the knots were still untied—its shape was quite unaltered. The risen body of Jesus had passed through the grave-clothes, just as it had passed through the stone which the angel had afterwards rolled away.

Then St. John entered the tomb as well, and as he looked upon the clothes the truth flashed upon him. Jesus who had been dead was alive; He had risen again!

As the two disciples hastened back to Jerusalem with



THE ANGEL AT THE SEPULCHRE

the news of the wonderful things that they had seen, Mary Magdalene once more drew near the garden grave. Just as the mother bird hovers round the nest from which her young ones have been taken, so she could not keep away from the place that once had held the dear, dead body of her Lord.

Sadly Mary stood at the door of the sepulchre, and, as she stood, her tears fell fast upon the lilies at her feet. O cruel malice of Jesus' enemies, that could not leave even His dead body to rest in peace! Whither had it been carried; in what deserted, lonely place was it lying now?

Weeping, she stoops to look into the sepulchre, and as she looks she sees two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.

'Woman, why weepest thou?' she hears them say. Strange to say, Mary does not seem even surprised at the sight of angels in a grave; her heart is so dulled by pain and so full of the thought of her loss, that there does not seem room for any feeling of astonishment. And so she answers simply, 'Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him.'

As she speaks a shadow falls over her shoulder; she sees the faces of the angels change. They are looking at something—some one—behind her. Turning round quickly she sees—Jesus.

Yes, there He stood, the Risen Lord, His face aglow with tenderness and love, His figure bathed in the glory of the Resurrection light. 'Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou?' He gently says.

Mary did not know Jesus; He was the very last person she expected to see; besides, her eyes were too blurred and dimmed with tears for vision. Doubtless

this was the gardener, she thought, come in the early dawn to tend the rock-roses and the lilies and the other lovely flowers that grew about the grave.

‘Sir,’ she said, with sad and tremulous voice, ‘if thou have borne Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away.’ Jesus spoke one word, ‘Mary.’ Then Mary understood. She turned, and stretching out her arms, she fell at His feet with the cry, ‘Rabboni—oh, my Master!’

Jesus had not come back to earth to be with His disciples just as He had been before. He was changed, He was glorified. Mary must learn to look upon Him as something more than a beloved friend given back to her from death. Jesus was her Friend and Master; yes, but He was also her Saviour and her God.

‘Lay not hold of Me,’ come His words, ‘for I am not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God.’

As Jesus spoke He passed away from Mary’s eyes.

Her tears were all dried now. (‘Heaviness may endure for a night,’ sang David of old, ‘but joy cometh in the morning.’) Forthwith she ran to bring the disciples word that the Master was alive, that she had seen Him with her eyes, and that He had talked with her. It was to the little band of women, to whom God’s angel had showed the empty grave, that Jesus next appeared.

They were hastening back to Jerusalem, when suddenly the King stood before them in the way, glorious in His Risen Majesty, and they heard His voice, like the sound of many waters, bidding them ‘All hail!’

Overcome with awe and wonder, they too fell at Jesus’ feet, and clasped them with their hands. And Jesus

calmed their fears and sent them forth to bear the glad tidings to the disciples, that He had risen from the dead and that they should meet Him again in Galilee.

After this Jesus appeared to Simon Peter. The Bible is silent about that appearance—there are some things almost too beautiful and tender to be described. We can only dimly picture to ourselves the meeting between the sorrowing repentant apostle and the Risen Lord.

Very sacred, very wonderful, must that meeting have been ; the very thought of it fills our eyes with tears.

Meanwhile the soldiers, who had fled in terror from the garden, had found their way to Jerusalem, and standing before the Jewish Council pour into their ears the strange story of the earthquake, the angel's visit, and the empty tomb. As they speak, fear and consternation sit on every face. What is to be done ? The only possible thing, it seems, is to bribe these tell-tale witnesses to keep back the truth. So the chief priests and elders pour gold into the soldiers' hands and bid them give out that while they slept the disciples came and stole away the body of Jesus. Perhaps the story might come to Pilate's ears, but even so the soldiers need not be afraid. They would not be punished for having slept at their posts—the council would see to that. And so the soldiers take the gold and agree to tell the lie, while chief priest and elder, with sinking hearts, try hard to persuade themselves that there must be some mistake, and that Jesus could not possibly have arisen.

By this time the glad Easter morning had worn away, and now it is afternoon. Two of Jesus' disciples, Cleopas and another nameless disciple—perhaps St. Luke himself who tells the story—are passing along the mountain road on the way to their country home of Emmaus, a little village about eight miles from Jerusalem. They

were not sorry to breathe the pure sweet air of the countryside once more. Jerusalem had become a dreadful place to them; every sight and sound within its walls reminded them of the wicked deed that had sent Jesus to the Cross, and robbed them of the best and dearest Friend man ever had.

Soft and pleasant was the breeze that blew across the hills. The birds sang their madrigals among the branches of the wayside trees; the fields were green with the springing corn, and in the hedge-rows the lovely spring flowers blossomed.

Everything around them spoke of resurrection from the dead and the joy of life, yet the hearts of the disciples were heavy as they walked.

Always the Cross seemed to hang before their eyes—the blood-stained Cross, and the garden grave beyond it, in which all their dearest hopes lay buried. Jesus their Master was dead; they would never see Him again—that was the thought which lay like a dark shadow upon their hearts. Oh, how they felt His loss! It seemed as though it would never be summer weather with them again.

As they talked together in low, sad tones, suddenly they found a fellow-traveller walking at their side. They had not passed him upon the road or seen him walking towards them. Whence had he come? In answer to their startled, inquiring gaze the stranger speaks, but only to ask in kindly tones the subject of their talk, and why they looked so sad.

There was something in his voice, something in the gentle, sympathising look he bent upon them, which told the disciples that they had found a friend, and almost before they know it, they are opening their hearts to him and telling him the story of their loss. Jesus was dead,

the great Prophet whose words and works had filled men's hearts with wonder ; the Jewish rulers had nailed Him to the Cross. And His disciples had trusted,—O the bitterness of their disappointment!—that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel. Besides, this was the third day since His death. And then they went on to speak of the story the woman had brought back of an empty tomb and a vision of angels, which said that Jesus was alive. An idle tale it seemed to be, for certain of the disciples had afterwards visited the sepulchre, and though they found an empty tomb they saw no sign of Jesus.

Quietly the Unknown Comrade listened to the disciples' words, and then He opened his lips and began to speak to them of the Christ, and how it was necessary that He should enter into His glory through the gate of suffering. There was nothing strange in the thought. Moses and all the prophets had foretold that it should be so, for thus and thus had they written of the Saviour of the world, and thus and thus foretold His sorrow and His triumph.

Very sweet and full of comfort were the Stranger's words, and, as they listened, the dark shadow upon the disciples' hearts seemed to lift, and the light of hope came back.

All this while their steps were drawing nearer the little village of Emmaus, set amid the bloom and green of the distant hills. It was growing dusk ; already the sun had gone down in his glory like a king with a golden crown. In listening to their Companion's talk the disciples had not noticed how the time had flown.

As they entered the village, the Stranger made as though He would have gone further. But Cleopas and his companion felt they could not let their new Friend

go just yet. 'Abide with us,' they said, 'for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent,' and so, yielding to their entreaties, He turns aside to seek the shelter of their roof.

There in the courtyard beneath the shade of some leafy arbour the three travellers sit down to rest. How peaceful and quiet everything seems! A mellow light floods the distant hills and turns to misty gold the meadow-lands where the sheep are feeding; scarcely a leaf stirs upon the trellis; one by one through the quiet air the birds fly homeward to their nests.

Presently the evening meal is spread. And now, rising from His seat, the Stranger moves into the host's place, and, as they look on in wonder, the disciples see Him take the bread in His hands. He blesses it, He breaks it and gives it to them. As He does so the veil falls from their eyes and they know Him. It is Jesus Himself; yes, they recognise His face at last; and see! there are the very marks of the nails in His hands. But as they stretch out their arms towards Him with a cry of joy, lo! His seat is empty. He has vanished.

O the gladness and joy that filled the disciples' hearts! How blind they had been! They might have guessed who it was. 'Did not our heart burn within us,' they say to each other, 'while He talked with us by the way and while He opened to us the Scriptures?'

Late as it is they rise up in haste and hurry back to Jerusalem to bring the apostles word that Jesus, whom they had mourned as dead, had conquered death and come back to be with them once more. On beneath the star-lit skies they speed with eager feet, their weariness forgotten in the joy of bearing so glad and wonderful a message. The gates are still open as they reach the city. Quickly they make their way to the upper room



THE SUPPER AT EMMAUS

where the disciples are met together, to talk over the strange events of this most strange, eventful day.

The doors are bolted—for danger still threatened the friends of Jesus, and no man's life was safe—but at the voice of Cleopas the bolts fly back, and the two travellers burst into the room.

Even before they have time to speak, the glad chorus of the disciples breaks out, 'The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon.' Then they tell the tale of the Unknown Comrade, and how Jesus 'in another form' had walked with them along the mountain-path to Emmaus, and had made Himself known to them in the breaking of bread.

Suddenly in the midst of the din of questioning, exclaiming voices there comes a hush. There in the midst stands Jesus. The doors were shut and barred. No one had seen Him come. 'Peace be unto you,' He says, and as He speaks He stretches out His hands in blessing.

Oh, whose voice, whose form was this? Trembling and shrinking back the disciples gaze with fearful eyes upon the awful shining figure of their Lord. Could this be in very truth Jesus Himself, or was it some spirit come down to them from Heaven? As they stand wondering and afraid, Jesus speaks again. 'Why are ye troubled?' He asks; 'and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself: handle Me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see Me have.' And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet, and they saw the holes the cruel spikes had made.

Then while fear still fought with the sudden rush of joy that began to fill their hearts He called for food, and they brought Him a piece of broiled fish and some honey-

comb—the humble fare which He had so often shared with them in days gone by.

And He took them and did eat before them. Then at last their doubts fled away. It was no phantom, no spirit after all; it was their dear, dear Master Himself. He was alive, He had come back to them! Crowding round Him, we seem to see them kneeling at His feet, and weeping tears of penitence and joy.

And as they kneel the tender, gracious voice of the Risen Lord is heard again, solemnly giving them their commission to act as His ambassadors: 'Peace be unto you. As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you.' And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said, 'Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.'

Then His voice died away. They looked up at Him as they knelt, and lo! He had gone. Unbarring the door they went forth. The morning star was shining brightly in the heavens. The first Easter Day had come to an end.

II

DOUBTING THOMAS AND THE RISEN LORD—THE MORNING ON THE LAKE—HOW THE KING WENT UP TO HEAVEN

AMONG the little circle of friends and disciples of Jesus to whom Easter Day had brought such untold joy and happiness, there was one desolate heart that still remained un comforted.

Thomas, called Didymus, or the Twin, was not with the disciples when Jesus appeared to them in the upper chamber. His grief and agony of mind were such that he had not the heart to go among his friends. He could not even bear to speak of what had happened. He wanted to be alone; and so he shut himself up in his solitary lodging to brood in blank, stony misery over the cruel blow that had robbed him of his Lord.

And now the report was abroad that Jesus was alive!

St. Thomas heard the news quite unmoved. He did not believe it. It was not the way of St. Thomas to believe good news. He was the apostle who always looked on the dark side of things, and instead of hoping for the best, ever feared the worst.

When, a little before, Jesus had proposed to leave His safe shelter in Peræa to go to Bethany, it was St. Thomas who had at once made up his mind that they were all going to be killed. 'Let us also go,' he had said, 'that we may die with Him.' So when the disciples broke in upon him with the joyous cry, 'We have seen the Lord,' he only answered with a deep-drawn sigh and

mournful shake of the head. It was all a mistake; the disciples were deceived. They would never persuade him that Jesus had really risen. In vain might St. John describe how the Master had eaten the honeycomb before their eyes, and St. Peter repeat the very words He had used; St. Thomas was not to be convinced. 'Except,' he said, 'I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe.'

So a whole week went by, and still St. Thomas remained plunged in the darkness of despair and nursing his gloomy doubts.

Then suddenly the light broke, and his doubts were swept away. 'The evening of the first day' had come round again, and something—it must have been God's finger—drew St. Thomas to join the apostles in the upper chamber.

Once more the doors are closely barred where the disciples are gathered together for fear of the Jews. Prayer has been offered up and they are talking quietly together, perhaps rehearsing the glad events of Easter Day, when suddenly the room seems to brighten, and they look up, and there in their midst stands Jesus, just as He stood on the first Easter evening—His hands outstretched in blessing, the sweet word 'Peace' once more upon His lips!

For a space the disciples gaze upon the splendid Figure of the Risen Lord in silent, breathless awe, and then Jesus speaks. His eyes are turned upon St. Thomas. 'Reach hither thy finger,' He says, 'and behold My hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into My side: and be not faithless, but believing.'

As Jesus spoke, Thomas saw the nail-prints plainly enough; he saw, too, the cruel gash the Roman spear had

made, but he made no attempt to stretch out his hand. He did not want proofs now. From where he stood he had already touched Jesus—only not with his fingers, but with his heart.

‘My Lord and my God,’ was all he said. And then Jesus’ voice broke the solemn silence once again. ‘Thomas,’ He said sadly—and yet though His voice was sad there was a very tender, gracious light in His eyes, for He knew well how deeply St. Thomas loved Him—‘Thomas, because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.’

‘How oft, O Lord, Thy Face hath shone
On doubting souls whose wills were true!
Thou Christ of Cephas and of John,
Thou art the Christ of Thomas too.

His brethren’s word he would not take
But craved to touch those Hands of Thine:
The bruised reed Thou didst not break;
He saw, and hailed His Lord Divine.

O Saviour, make Thy Presence known
To all who doubt Thy Word and Thee,
And teach them in that Word alone
To find the truth that sets them free.

And we who know how true Thou art,
And Thee as God and Lord adore,
Give us, we pray, a loyal heart
To trust and love Thee more and more.’

From Jerusalem, in obedience to the Risen Lord’s commands, the disciples went back again to Galilee. Jesus had promised to meet them there, and they went to await His coming, though they did not know when He would come, or in what form He might appear. It was natural that they should find their way back to

Capernaum and the Lake of Galilee once more. What great events had happened since last they had trodden the shores of the silver sea and cast their nets upon its moonlit waters! O the happy days gone by when Jesus sat with them in the boat, and they listened to His gracious, golden words, while the fresh sea-breeze sang in the sail, and the water lapped against the vessel's sides! There ran the road along the shore, beneath the shadow of whose trees He would so often walk; there rose the far-off mountain-peak from which He had watched their battle with the storm! As they hoisted sail and dipped their oars in the clear waters of the lake, they felt at times like men in a dream. Had the old days come back again? Should they wake presently to find Jesus, their dear Master, with them in the boat?

One evening as the sun's rim dips and the shadows begin to gather, St. Peter decides to go a-fishing. By this time the bag which Judas used to carry was empty, and the apostles had gone back to their old trade as fishermen, in order to gain a living for themselves. The night seemed to promise well for fishing, and the other disciples decide to go as well, and presently the boat is launched and lies tossing far out at sea, while the fishermen prepare to let down their nets for a draught. But that night, toil as they may, they are fated to catch nothing. Time after time they cast and draw in their nets, but not a single fish is taken. At last, weary and dispirited, chilled by the night wind, and drenched by the salt sea spray, they gather their nets together and begin to row towards the shore.

It was now early morning. The dawn had not yet begun to break, and a grey mist lay upon the shore and shrouded the summits of the distant mountains; but every minute it was growing lighter, and already the

sullen waters of the lake were being touched to tender shades of pearl and silver. As they drew near the land they saw a Figure standing upon the beach. It was Jesus, but in the dim, uncertain light they did not know Him at first; perhaps—as when He walked with the two disciples to Emmaus—He did not will that they should know Him.

‘Children,’ came His voice to them over the waters, ‘have ye aught to eat?’ It was no doubt, they thought, some stranger, asking them news of their night’s catch. ‘No,’ they called out in answer. And then the Stranger spoke again, ‘Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find.’

The disciples knew that sometimes the presence of a shoal of fish could be detected from the shore by the deeper colour of the water, though the fishermen themselves might know nothing of it, and so they at once let down the net as they were directed. And now the net enclosed in its meshes so great a multitude of fish that even the strong arms of the disciples were powerless to draw it in.

Like a flash St. John’s thoughts travelled back to another morning scene on the lake, when Jesus had been with them in the boat, and had filled their nets when they themselves had lost all hopes of filling them. He looked long and earnestly at the Figure on the beach. ‘It is the Lord!’ he whispered eagerly to St. Peter.

When St. Peter heard these words his heart gave a great leap. He could not wait for the boat to beach itself. Girding his rough fisher’s coat about him, he plunged into the sea and swam to the shore. Meanwhile the other disciples followed in the little skiff which their boat towed in its wake, dragging the net full of fishes.

When they had come to land they found a fire burn-

ing on the hard white sand, with fish laid upon it, and bread.

How like Jesus! He knew how tired and hungry and cold His disciples would be after their long night's toil, and His love and tenderness had led Him to make this provision for their wants.

'Bring of the fish which ye have now caught,' they hear Him say, and Simon Peter, eager as ever to be the first to carry out his Master's orders, hastens to the water's edge and draws the net to land.

Full of great fishes was the net, in number an hundred and fifty and three, and for all there were so many its meshes held, not a fish had been lost.

Then Jesus bade the disciples come and break their fast, and as they gathered around the fire He moved in kingly presence amongst them, and with His own hands ministered to their needs. Very full of joy were the disciples' hearts—yet very full of awe and wonder too—at this meeting with their Master. No one spoke—no one dared to speak. With humble, adoring eyes they watched His every movement, awaiting His commands, wondering what His Presence by the sea might mean.

Presently the morning meal comes to an end, and Jesus turns to read a lesson to St. Peter, His 'wild, wayward scholar,' as some one calls him.

'Simon, son of Jonas,' He says, calling St. Peter by his old name as though to remind him that through his cowardice he had lost his claim to the name of Peter the Rock—'Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these?'

St. Peter had liked to think in the old days before his fall that he loved Jesus better than the rest, but he had learned to think more humbly of himself since that terrible night when he had denied his Master with an oath. And

so, without daring to compare himself with his friends, with a wistful look at Jesus, he answers gently, 'Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love Thee.'

Then Jesus began to unfold the work in store for Peter.

'Feed My little lambs,' He said. In other words, 'Teach the children to love and follow Me, Peter, who loved and died for them upon the Cross.'

And when He had said this He put the question once again, 'Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?'

With the same gentle voice and appealing look St. Peter answered as he had done before, 'Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love Thee,' and then the Good Shepherd bade him tend His sheep. The little lambs were to be St. Peter's first care, and then the rest of the beautiful flock that God had given the Saviour for His own.

Three times St. Peter had denied his Lord and three times he must be put to the test. In grave and tender tones Jesus speaks yet once again, 'Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?'

In the Greek there are two words for love. Jesus had hitherto used the higher and more divine word, while Peter in his humility had been content to use the lower and more human one. But now Jesus adopts the very word St. Peter uses. It almost seemed as though there was a doubt in His mind whether St. Peter really loved Him, even with the lower kind of love which he professed.

By this time Peter's face had grown very sad. His voice faltered. 'Lord,' he said unsteadily, 'Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee.' And Jesus answered, 'Feed My sheep.'

Jesus had long ago forgiven Peter. He knew well—none better—how deep and heartfelt his repentance was, and how real and true his love. He had spoken to

remind him that his repentance must lead to action, his love must be shown by much serving.

Having given St. Peter his commission, Jesus added these solemn words, 'Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not.'

At the time, perhaps, St. Peter would not understand these words, but in after days they would come back to him, and then he would understand.

We look on a few years. In the dim light of a prison cell, an old man sits patiently awaiting his summons to depart. There is a tramp of armed men without. The door of his dungeon opens and a centurion and his soldiers enter. The prisoner starts up. It is St. Peter. He stretches forth his hands. They bind him and lead him forth to die upon the cross. When he reaches the place of execution he begs earnestly that he may be crucified with his head towards the ground. He is not worthy, he says, to suffer death after the same fashion as his Master suffered it. So he mounts the cross, and presently his soul goes up the shining way to God, and he wins the martyr's crown.

After this, Jesus, speaking again to St. Peter, said, 'Follow Me.'

It was the old command that had come to Simon the fisherman by the lake, when Jesus had first chosen him to be His disciple. Now that by God's grace he had made a fresh start, he must press bravely on in the footsteps of his Lord. There must be no more denials, no more faltering, no more turning back now. Gladly and proudly St. Peter walked by his Master's side. Presently looking back he saw St. John following. Here was one

who was nearer and dearer to Jesus perhaps than any other earthly friend. What had Jesus in store for him, he wondered. 'Lord,' he said, 'and what shall this man do?' But Jesus had no word to speak to Peter about the life-work of St. John. It was not for St. Peter to pry too curiously into matters which were not his concern. 'If I will that he tarry till I come,' He answered, 'what is that to thee? Follow *thou* Me.'

We are told that afterwards the disciples of Jesus took these words to mean that St. John was not to die; but Jesus did not say this, as St. John himself points out. What He did was to tell St. Peter to be satisfied with doing his appointed work, and to leave the future of his friend with God.

St. John's life, in the end, turned out to be a very long and eventful one. He lived to serve his Master and to fight the battle of the faith for many years after the rest of the apostles had been called away. Then when death came to him, it came in very gentle, loving guise. When old and weary and grey-headed, 'God's finger touched him, and he slept.' A lovely legend tells us that when too old and feeble to walk, he would be carried into the church to address his people, and that his message was always this, 'Little children, love one another.' It is said that these were the last words he uttered as he died.

'The beautiful part of the wonder was that Jesus seemed to care for the same things that He used to care for before He died; not only for the truths and friends, but for the places that He loved.'

After this meeting with His apostles upon the shore of the lake, He met them again upon a mountain in Galilee—perhaps the Mount of the Transfiguration—perhaps the green hill of the Beatitudes where three

years before He had solemnly called them to His service, and laid down the laws of the kingdom which they were to help Him to build.

This time the apostles were not alone. The royal command had gone forth, and more than five hundred disciples were gathered together to meet the King. As the great company knelt before Him upon the mountain-side with rapt, adoring faces, waiting His commands, the King spoke. He told them that all power had been given Him in Heaven and in earth, and bade them go forth and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, and teaching them to observe His laws. Through all the changing years His presence should be with them in their work. His promise should stand sure; He would never leave them nor forsake them. 'Lo, I am with you all the days,' He said, 'even unto the end of the world.'

Thus for forty days the Risen Lord showed Himself alive to His disciples. Oh, with what deep longing must His heart have kept turning all that while towards His Father's Home! Yet He was in no haste to leave the world He had come to save. His throne was set high amid the stars, upon its 'paved work of a sapphire'; golden harps were sounding, angel legions were hovering in the sky to bring Him Home in triumph; yet still He lingered, for still His friends had need of Him. The disciples must be able to go forth and preach 'Jesus and the Resurrection' without any shadow of doubt that He had really risen. They must be taught new lessons about 'the Kingdom of God'; they must be counselled how to rule the Church aright; they must be advised as to how the perils and difficulties which lay before them were to be met and conquered.

So Jesus remained on earth, heartening, comforting, teaching His apostles; and then, His work done, the day of parting came at last.

The Eleven were at Jerusalem. They had come back again from the uplands of sunny Galilee in obedience to their Lord's command, to await the coming of the Comforter whom He had promised to send them from the Father. There in the Holy City Jesus appeared to them, and for the last time led them out of the city gates. Together, as they had so often done before, they crossed the little brawling stream that tumbled at the valley foot, together they climbed the well-remembered path that led over the green hill towards Bethany.

We can picture the scene to ourselves. Evening is coming on. The wind has dropped; not a breath ruffles the silver of the olive-trees; in the west the angels are swinging back the gates of gold to let the sun go down.

As they went Jesus spoke to His disciples of the Kingdom and its glories, till their eyes began to fill, and their hearts to burn with eager, wistful longing. Had the hour struck at last? Was the Christ about to begin His promised reign of peace and righteousness and love?

In reply, Jesus told them that this was God's secret. They would have to wait His time. But at the same time, to hearten them, He told them of the power that should be theirs through the outpouring of the Blessed Spirit, and how they should be His witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

As He spoke He lifted up His hands and solemnly blessed them while they knelt down at His feet. And as He blessed them He was parted from them and began to rise into the clear air. His voice grew faint. It died

away. Higher and higher they watched Him rise until a bright cloud came, like a golden chariot, and bore Him away, and they saw Him no more.

Then while they stood rooted to the spot, looking up into the empty sky with wondering, troubled eyes, two angels in white apparel appeared at their side. 'Ye men of Galilee,' they said, 'why stand ye gazing up into Heaven? This same Jesus which is taken up from you into Heaven shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into Heaven.'

With this the apostles turned to go back to Jerusalem; but not in sorrow of heart or in wonder now. Their faces were bright with Heavenly joy. Jesus, their Master, had gone to His Father, as He said. Sadness and suffering could never touch Him now. He had gone, but not to forget them, nor to lose sight of them. Hidden from their eyes His Presence would be ever with them. Through storm and sunshine, in sorrow and in joy, He would guide and defend His Church. By and by, as the angels had reminded them, and as He Himself had said, He would come again and receive them unto Himself.

So 'they worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the Temple, praising and blessing God.'

Dear child, if the cloud that hid Jesus from the eyes of His apostles still hides Him from our sight to-day, yet the thought which brought them gladness may bring us gladness too. We are not left to fight the hard battle and bear the heavy cross alone. We have a Friend in Heaven—One who has gone to prepare a place for us, who ever lives to make intercession for us, and who 'is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him.'



THE ASCENSION

Jesus our great High Priest 'is passed into the Heavens,' but one day He will return.

Not yet has the angels' promise been fulfilled. The years roll on and we are still as servants who wait for their Lord. But we wait with our faces turned towards the East—the place of the sun-rising.

'So I am watching quietly
Every day ;
Whenever the sun shines brightly
I rise and say—
"Sunlight is the shining of His Face !"
And look into the gates of His high place
Beyond the sea,
For I know He is coming shortly,
To summon me.

And when a shadow falls across the window
Of my room,
Where I am working my appointed task,
I lift my head to watch the door, and ask
If He is come.
And the angel answers sweetly
In my home,—
"Only a few more shadows,
And He will come."'

Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

INDEX

- ABIJAH**, 'company' of, 7.
Alabaster box of ointment, the, 183-5.
Andrew, St., 91, 92, 127, 152, 204, 333, 346.
Angel stories, the Bible ashine with, 5, 6, 8-9, 12, 23, 83, 355.
Angels at the grave of Jesus, 392-3; appearance of, after the Ascension, 414.
Anna at the presentation of Jesus, 32, 33.
Annas, the high priest, 357, 359.
Anointing of Jesus' feet, 303-5.
Antonia, Castle of, 60.
Apostles commissioned, the, 151-4, 201-2, 409-14; appearances to, after the Resurrection, 393-412.
Archelaus (Herod's son), 47, 300.
Arrest of Jesus, 355-6.
Ascension of our Lord, 413-14.

BAPTISM of Jesus, 78-9.
Barabbas, the Jews choose, 369-70.
Bartholomew, St., 152.
Bartimæus the blind beggar of Jericho, 295-8.
Beatitudes, the, 156-7.
'Beautiful Gate' of the Temple, 62.
Bethabara, 177, 285.
Bethany, the home of, 255-7, 302-5; 310, 314, 317, 343-5, 413.
Bethel, 19.
Bethesda ('the house of mercy'), the cripple at the Pool of, 165-6.
Bethlehem, birth of Jesus at, 18-24.
Bethphage ('the house of green figs'), 310.
Bethsaida ('the house of fish'), 92, 127.
 — **Julias**, 203; **Jesus** at, 221.
Blind and the lame, healing the, 221, 316.
Bread of Life, Christ the, 211-12.
Broad and narrow way, Jesus describes the, 162-3.

CÆSAREA-PHILIPPI, St. Peter's brave confession at, 221-3.
Caiaphas the high priest, 290, 343, 357, 359.
Calvary, Jesus at, 374-87.
Cana, the marriage feast of, 95-101; Jesus heals the nobleman's son at, 118-21.
Capernaum, Jesus' home at, 102-4, 119-26; miracles of healing at, 131-40; 141, 151, 188, 198, 206, 214, 233.
Cedron, the brook, 313, 352, 353.
Census, or numbering of the people, 19.
Centurion, the, at the Cross of Jesus, 385, 386.
Centurion's servant, healing the, 170-2.
Childhood of Jesus, 45-56.
Children, Jesus loved by, 234; blesses the, 276-8; the little singing, 316-17.
Chorazin ('the woody place'), 127.
Christian Church, the first, 348.
Christmas, the first, 21-4.
 — **carol**, the first, 23.
Circumcision of Jesus, the, 26.
Claudia, Pilate's wife, her dream about Jesus, 369.
Commandment, the great, 327-8; the new, 348.
Common things of life made glorious by Jesus, 349-50.
Communion, Holy, institution of, 212; the first, 348-50.
Courses or companies of Temple priests, 7.
Courts of the Temple :—
 Court of the Gentiles, 62, 104.
 — of the Women, 62, 240, 330-1.
 — of Israel, 62.
 — of the Priests, 62.
Covetousness, Jesus warns against, 249-50.

- Cripple at the Pool of Bethesda, the, 165-6.
 Crippled woman, the, 251.
 Cross, Christ's call to His followers to bear the, 224-5; to the Romans a symbol of shame, 376.
 Crucifixion, the, 375-87.
 Curtain of the Temple, 63; rent at the Crucifixion, 385.
- DARKNESS**, the great, at the Crucifixion, 382-3.
 Day of Atonement, the, 63.
 — of Judgment (or 'Dies Irae'), 337.
 Deaf and dumb man cured, the, 217.
 Death the gate of life, 333-4.
 Decapolis, 216, 217, 218, 333.
 Dedication, Feast of the (or Feast of Lights), 258-9.
 Demoniac of Gadara, the, 195-7.
 Denarius (a silver coin), 282, 325.
 Disciples, the two first (St. Andrew and St. Simon Peter), 91-3; the call to the twelve, 151; their names, 152; differences of character, 152-3; their poverty and humility, 153-4; pluck the ears of corn on the Sabbath, 167-8; their faintheartedness, 222, 291-2; dispute pre-eminence, 233-4, 345-6; in the Garden of Gethsemane, 352-5; appearances to, after the Resurrection, 393-412; the five hundred, 412.
 Diseased and the possessed, healing of the, 132-5.
 Doctors, Jesus among the, 65-6.
 Dothan, 19.
 Doves, offering of, by the Virgin Mary at the Temple, 27.
 Drag-net, parable of the, 193.
- EAR** of the high priest's servant touched, 356.
 East, burial in the, 285.
 Easter, the first, 391-6.
 Egypt, the Flight into, 45-6; and the Nile, 46-7.
 Eight-fold woe pronounced by Jesus against His enemies, 329-30.
 Elisabeth (mother of St. John the Baptist), 6, 14, 15, 16.
 Emmaus, Christ's appearance to the disciples at, 397-400.
- Ephraim, the town of, 291.
 Esdraelon, the plain of, 50, 58.
 Eyes of the blind, Jesus touches the, 221.
- FAITH**, the power of, 230-2, 317.
 False son, parable of the, 319.
 Fasting, a question about, 150.
 Feeding the four thousand, 219-20.
 Fig-tree, the barren, 314-15.
 First-born son presented to the Lord, 27; what it reminded the Jews of, 28.
 'Fishers of men,' 127-30.
 Fishes, the miraculous draught of, 127-31.
 Five loaves, miracle of the, 203-6.
 Flight into Egypt, the, 45-6.
 Forerunner, the, preaching of the King's, 71-8.
 Forgiveness, a lesson about, 235-6; story of a little boy's, 237.
 Forty days, the, in the wilderness, 81; the, after the Resurrection, 412-13.
 Fountain of Living Water, the Holy Spirit the, 240.
 Friend at midnight, parable of the, 248-9.
 Fruitless fig-tree, parable of the, 314-5.
- GABRIEL**, the angel, appearance of, to Zacharias, 8-9; to Mary, 12-13.
 Gadara, 127; the demoniac of, 195-7.
 Gain, law of loss and, in the heavenly life, 340-1.
 Galilee of the Gentiles, 48, 111, 118, 137, 167, 233, 246, 405.
 — Sea of, 126-7, 218; Jesus' appearance to the disciples at, 207-8, 406-10.
 Garden of God, a story of the, 43-44.
 Gennesareth ('the garden land'), 102-3.
 Gerizim, Samaritans' temple at, 112.
 Gethsemane, Garden of, 313; Jesus in the, 352-5.
 Golden rule, the, 161-2.
 Good Friday, the first, 387.
 — Samaritan, parable of the, 251-4.
 — Shepherd, Christ the, 218, 243-5.
 Gospel of the Hand (St. Mark's Gospel), 134.
 Great Supper, parable of the, 260-2.
 Greeks, Jesus and the inquiring, 333.

'Green Thursday' (the day before the
Passover), 344.

HALL of Polished Stones in the Temple,
7.

Hallel, the great, 239, 311.

Hebron, 6, 13-15.

Hermon, Mount, 49; the Mount of
Transfiguration, 225, 292.

Herod (the Great) and the wise men,
38-40; and the murder of the Inno-
cents, 41-4; 106, 300.

— (Antipas), and the murder of St.
John the Baptist, 177-82; Jesus
before, 367-8.

Herodias and St. John the Baptist,
180.

Holy Place in the Temple, visit of the
angel to Zacharias in the, 8, 10, 11;
63.

Holy of Holies and what it contained,
63.

Holy Spirit, outpouring of the, on the
apostles, 413-14.

Home at Nazareth, the, 50-3.

Houses, parable of the two, 163-4.

Humility, a sermon on, 260.

Husbandmen, parable of the wicked,
319-20.

INNOCENTS, murder of the, 42-4.

JAIRUS' DAUGHTER, raising of, 198-201.

James, St., 127, 152, 292-4, 354.

— the Little, St., 152.

Jericho ('the city of palms'), the blind
beggar of, 295-8; 300.

Jerusalem, Feast of the Passover at,
57-64; 291; the triumphal entry
into, 309-12; Jesus weeps over, 312-
13, 330; foretells the destruction of,
337; Jesus' appearance to His dis-
ciples at, 401-2.

Jesus, what the name means, 12, 18, 26.

Jewish hospitality, 97, 183.

— marriage described, 95-6.

Jezreel, 19.

John, St., 91, 127, 152, 292-4, 345-7;
at the sepulchre of Jesus, 393-5;
407, 410-11; legend of, 411.

— the Baptist, St. ('the Fore-
runner'), birth of, 15-17; his
preaching, 71-8; baptism of Jesus
by, 76-9; murder of, in the Black

Castle of Machaerus, 177-82; 202,
318.

Jordan, 77, 89.

Joseph of Arimathea, 386-7.

— the Carpenter, 11, 18-24, 25-8,
45-7, 50-2, 77.

Judas Iscariot, 152, 303-4; sells his
Master, 344; Jesus washes Judas'
feet, 346; the traitor unmasked,
347-8; 355; his suicide, 362.

Jude, St., 152.

Justinian and Euphrasia, a story of,
332.

KING in His glory on the Mount of
Transfiguration, 225-8.

Kingdom of God, Jesus lays down the
laws of the, 155-64; the seven pic-
tures of the, 188-93; the builders of
the, 201.

King's robe worn by the King's guests,
323.

LAMB of God, the, 89-90.

Lazarus, 255, 279; raised from the
dead, 285-9; 303.

Leaven, parable of the, 191.

Legends and stories:—

Legends of the Holy Birth, 21-2.

Story of the Garden of God, 43-4.

Legend of the Flight into Egypt,
45-6.

A Legend of Nazareth, 96.

Jesus and the dead dog, 145-6.

The sinful man and the Pope, 175.
'Teresa and two sous, *and God*,'
231-2.

A little boy's forgiveness, 236-7.

The little girl and the Good
Shepherd, 244-5.

The nine ungrateful lepers, 247.

The Glasgow woman who was like
the Good Samaritan, 254.

The prodigal girl, 271.

Justinian and Euphrasia, 332.

Martin the cobbler, and his vision,
342.

St. Peter's threefold denial, 361.

The vacant picture in the gallery
at Venice, 363.

'The Patriot,' 374.

Legend of St. John, 411.

Leper cleansed, the, 137-40.

Lepers, the cleansing of the ten, 246-7.

Leprosy, what it is, 137.
 Levi (or Matthew).—*See* Matthew.
 Lord's Prayer, the, 248; twice given by Jesus, 160 *n*.
 Lost coin, parable of the, 265-6.
 ——— sheep, parable of the, 263-4.
 Lots cast for Jesus' garment, 379.
 Love the great commandment, 327-8.
 Lunatic boy, Jesus restores the, 229-31.

MACHAERUS, St. John the Baptist in the Black Castle of, 177-82.
 Magdala, Jesus at, 220.
 Magnificat (or 'Song of the heart that gives God glory'), 14.
 Malchus, the high priest's servant, 356.
 Man who was born blind, the, 241-3.
 ——— with the dropsy, 259.
 ——— with the withered hand, the, 168-70.

Mark, St. (author of 'the Gospel of the Hand'), 134; 401.
 Martha, 255-6, 279, 285-9, 302.
 Mary the mother of Jesus, appearance of the Angel Gabriel to, 12, 13; birth of our Lord, 18-24; 25-29, 41, 42, 45-52, 57-66; at the Cross, 382.
 ——— the sister of Lazarus, sits at Jesus' feet, 255-6; 279; her brother raised from the dead, 285-9; anoints Jesus' feet, 303-4.
 ——— Magdalene, and the alabaster box of ointment, 183-5; 382; at the grave of Jesus, 393-6.
 ——— the wife of Cleopas, 382, 393.

Matthew, St., the call of, 144-9; 152.
 Mina (a sum of money), 300.
 Miracles of our Lord:—
 Turning Water into Wine, 97-99.
 Healing the Nobleman's Son, 118-21.
 The Miraculous Draught of Fishes, 127-31.
 Healing the Man possessed, 132-3.
 Healing Simon Peter's Wife's Mother, 133-4.
 The Leper cleansed, 137-40.
 Healing the Sick of the Palsy, 142-4.
 The Cripple at the Pool of Bethesda, 165-6.
 The Man with the Withered Hand, 168-70.

The Centurion's Servant, 170-2.
 Raising the Widow's Son at Nain, 173-5.
 The Stilling of the Waves, 194-5.
 The Demoniac of Gadara, 195-7.
 Raising of Jairus' daughter, 198-201.
 The Five Loaves, 203-6.
 The Walking on the Water, 207.
 The Daughter of the Woman of Syro-Phoenicia, 214-16.
 The Deaf and Dumb Man, 217.
 Feeding the Four Thousand, 219-20.
 Touching the Eyes of the Blind, 221.
 The Lunatic Boy, 229-31.
 The Coin from the Fish's Mouth, 250.
 The Man who was born Blind, 241-3.
 The Ten Lepers, 246-7.
 The Crippled Woman, 251.
 The Man with the Dropsy, 259.
 The Raising of Lazarus, 279, 285-9.
 The Blind Beggar of Jericho, 295-8.
 The Barren Fig-tree, 314-15.
 The High Priest's Servant, 356.
 Other miracles of healing, 134-5, 137, 203, 216, 316.

Money, a question about, 249.
 Money-changers in the Temple, 104, 314; Jesus drives them forth, 105-6, 315-16.

Mount Hermon, 49; the Mount of Transfiguration, 225, 292.
 ——— Moriah, 60, 61.
 ——— of Blessing, the King on the, 155-64.
 ——— of Olives, 311, 317, 336.
 ——— Tabor, 49.
 ——— Zion, 60.

Mustard-seed, parable of the, 190-1.

NAIN, raising the widow's son at, 173-5.
 Nathanael, Jesus and, 93-5; supposed to be St. Bartholomew, 152.
 Nazareth, 11, 13, 15; the life of Jesus at, 48-56; the rejection at, 121-6.
 'Needle's eye,' what Jesus meant by the, 281.

Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night, 108-11; 387.

Nobleman, the, and the pieces of money, 300-2.

Nobleman's son, healing the, 118-21.

Obedience, Jesus' life of, 54.

Outcast, Jesus' love for the, 148-9, 262-3.

Palsy, healing the sick of the, 142-4.

Parables of our Lord:—

The Two Houses, 163-4.

The Two Debtors, 185.

The Sower, 189-90.

The Tares, 190.

The Mustard Seed, 190-1.

The Leaven, 191.

The Hid Treasure, 191.

The Pearl of Great Price, 191-2.

The Drag-net, 193.

The Unmerciful Servant, 235-6.

The Friend at Midnight, 248-9.

The Rich Churl, 250-1.

The Good Samaritan, 251-4.

The Great Supper, 260-2.

The Lost Sheep, 263-4.

The Lost Coin, 265-6.

The Prodigal Son, 266-71.

The Unjust Steward, 272-3.

The Rich Man and the Beggar, 273-5.

The Pharisee and the Publican, 275-6.

The Labourers in the Vineyard, 282-4.

The Pounds, 300-2, 340.

The Fruitless Fig-tree, 314-15.

The False Son, 319.

The Wicked Husbandmen, 319-20.

The Wedding-Feast, 321-3.

The Ten Virgins, 338-9.

The Talents, 340-1.

Parables of Jesus so many coloured pictures, 189.

Passion, Christ foretells His, 223, 292-4.

Passover, Feast of the, 57-64, 104, 345.
— lamb, the, 64.

Pearl of great price, parable of the, 191-2.

Penitent thief on the cross, the, 381-2.

Pentecost (or Ingathering), Feast of, 57.

Perica, 246, 259, 279.

Peter, St. (Simon Peter), 91, 92; 'a fisher of men,' 127-30; 133, 141, 152, 208, 213; his brave confession, 221-3; rebuked, 224; 225, 227, 235; his pride, 282; 317, 345-7; denies his Lord, 351, 359-61; and the high priest's servant, 356; at the grave of Jesus, 393-5; Christ's appearances to, 397, 406-10; wins the martyr's crown, 410.

Pharisee and the Publican, parable of the, 275-6.

Pharisees, their parade of piety, 107-8, 159, 160; displeased with Jesus, 149, 290, 311; and Sadducees ask Jesus for a sign, 220.

Philip, St., 92, 93, 152, 153; and the five loaves, 204; 332.

'Phylacteries,' what they were, 57-8.

Pilate, Pontius, trial of Jesus before, 364-73; his moral weakness, 370, 373; 380, 385, 392.

Pity of Jesus, the, 330.

Pounds, parable of the, 300-2, 340.

Poverty of Jesus, 25, 53-4, 249.

Prætorium or Judgment-hall, 365-6, 372, 373.

Prayer, the Lord's, 248, 160 n.; Jesus constant in, 248.

Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, 26-33.

Priest and the Levite, the, 253.

Prodigal girl, story of a, 271.

— son, parable of the, 266-71.

Publicans (or tax-gatherers) despised, 144-5; and sinners, Jesus' love for, 262-3.

'REDEEMING' a child offered to the Lord, 28.

Refusal, the great, 281.

Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth, 121-6.

Resurrection, Jesus foretells His, 223, 228, 292; denied by the Sadducees, 326-7; Christ's, 391-7.

Rich churl, parable of the, 250-1.

— man and the beggar, parable of the, 273-5.

'Road of the loving heart,' the, 163.

Roads, the choice of the two, 162-3.

Rock, St. Peter the, 92, 223.

'Rose gathered for the breast of God,' 43.

Ruler, Jesus and the rich young, 279-81.

SABBATH, Jesus heals on the, 133, 166, 241, 251; strictness of the Jews regarding the, 166-9; Jesus on the, 168-9, 251.

Sadducees the sceptics of their age, 326-7.

Salome (daughter of Herodias) asks for the head of St. John the Baptist, 180-1.

— (the mother of St. James and St. John) craves a boon for her sons, 292-3; 393.

Samaria, the woman at the well of, 113-16.

Samaritans, hostility between the Jews and, 111-12.

Sanctuary (or Holy House), 63, 336.

Sanhedrim (or great council), 290, 317, 343, 361, 364.

Schools of the Rabbis scrupulous about small things, 327.

Scourging and mocking of Jesus, 370-3.

Scribe who was not far from the Kingdom, 327-8.

Scribes and Pharisees, 131-2; their hostility to Jesus, 143-4, 149-50, 169, 186, 241; dispute with Jesus, 251-4; 317.

Second Coming, Jesus announces His, 337-8.

Sermon on the Mount, 155-64.

'Sermon on the Sea,' 188-9.

Service, Jesus' life of, 54.

Seven pictures of the Kingdom, 188-93.

Seventy, mission of the, 246.

'She hath done what she could,' 304-5.

Shechem (or Sychar), 113.

Sheep and the goats, the, 341-2.

— Gate, the, at Jerusalem, 165.

Shiloh, 19.

Sign given by the angel to Zacharias, 9.

Siloam, Pool of, 239, 242.

Simeon, the aged, 29; Song of (or Nunc Dimittis), 30, 31.

Simon Peter.—*See* Peter.

Simon Peter's wife's mother healed, 133-4.

— St., Zelotes, 152.

Simon of Bethany, Jesus in the house of, 302.

— the Cyrenean carries Jesus' cross, 376.

— the Pharisee entertains Jesus, 183-5.

Sinful man and the Pope, legend of the, 175.

Sinlessness of Jesus, 55, 217-18.

Sinners, Jesus eats with publicans and, 147-9.

Soldier's pity for Jesus on the Cross, 384.

Soldiers divide Jesus' garments, 379; watch by Jesus' grave, 392, 397.

Solomon's Porch in the Temple, 253.

'Songs of Ascent,' 59.

'Son of the Law,' 57.

'Sons of Thunder' (St. James and St. John), 238.

Sower, parable of the, 189-90.

'Star that appeared in the East,' 36-40.

Stars supposed to influence men's lives, 36.

Sternness of Jesus with the Pharisees, 186, 329-30.

'Stone that the builders rejected,' 321.

Storm on the lake, Jesus stills the, 194-5.

Sychar (or Shechem), 113, 117.

Synagogue, at Nazareth, 52-3; described, 121-2; at Capernaum, Jesus teaches in the, 131-3.

Syro-Phœnicia, daughter of the woman of, healed, 214-16.

TABERNACLES, Feast of, 57; Jesus at the, 237-41; ceremonies at the, 239-41.

Talents, parable of the, 340-1.

Tares, parable of the, 190.

Temple, priests of the, divided into twenty-four companies, 7; worship in the, described, 7-10; presentation of Jesus in the, 26-33; Jesus' visit to the, 57-66; courts described, 62-3; money-changers driven out of the, 104-6, 315-6; curtain of the, rent, 385.

— hill (or 'Mountain of the House'), 313.

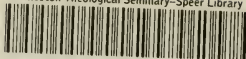
Temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, 81-7; its lesson for children, 87-8.

- Ten cities of Decapolis, the, 216-17.
 Teresa, St., story of, 231-2.
 Thieves, upon the cross, 331-2.
 Thirty pieces of silver, Jesus sold for, 344.
 Three great festivals of the Jewish Church, 57.
 — hours, the, upon the Cross, 382-3.
 Thomas, St. (Didymus or 'the Twin'), and the Risen Lord, 403-5.
 Tiberias, 127.
 Transfiguration of Christ, the, 225-9.
 Treasure, parable of the hidden, 191-2.
 Tribute-money, a question about, 324-6.
 Trumpets (great brazen chests), 330-1.
 Turning water into wine, 97-9.
 Twelve, Jesus sets apart the, 151-4.
 Two Debtors, parable of the, 185.
 Tyre and Sidon, the merchandise of, 213.
 UNJUST STEWARD, parable of the, 272-3.
 Unmerciful Servant, parable of the, 235-6.
 Upper room, Jesus in the, 345-50.
 VACANT picture, story of the, 363.
 Vine, Christ the true, 351-2.
 Vineyard, parable of the labourers in the, 232-4.
 Virgins, parable of the ten, 338-9.
 Voice from Heaven, 79, 227, 334.
 WASHING of hands, Jesus and the, 213.
 Water of Life, Jesus and the, 114-5.
 Waves, Jesus stills the, 194-5.
 Wedding-feast, parable of the, 321-3.
 Widow's mite, the, 331.
 Wilderness of St. John the Baptist called 'the Horror,' 72.
 — Temptation of Jesus in the, 81-7.
 Wise men of the East, visit of the, 34-41; their reputed names, 35.
 Women, the devout, at the Cross, 382; at the grave, 391, 393.
 Wonderful things which happened at the Crucifixion, 385.
 ZACCHÆUS, how he saw Jesus, 298-300.
 Zacharias, appearance of the angel to, 7-11; 15, 16.
 Zealots, a Jewish sect, 152.



BS2420.6 .S81
The child's life of Jesus

Princeton Theological Seminary-Speer Library



1 1012 00055 7035

